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ARTIST AND CRAFTSMAN.

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ARTIST AND CRAFTSMAN.

98164

Πᾶσα τέχνη καὶ πᾶσα μέθοδος,
ἀγαθοῦ τινὸς ἐφίεσθαι
ΔΟΚΕΙ.

"Every art and every craft, SEEMETH to aim at some good."

Cambridge:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
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London.
1860.

God
OSD
Art Asst
98164

REVERING TOIL, ADMIRING SONG,

TO THE CHILDREN OF EITHER

I DEDICATE MY BOOK.

'*This Work has been reprinted from the* DUBLIN UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE.

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ARTIST AND CRAFTSMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE—THE CRAFTSMAN—THE OXONIANS.

"So we part friends," she said, with clear voice and trustful look. "As brother and sister: good-bye."

"Brother and sister," muttered the young man as she disappeared. "I hear bees hum and grasshoppers chirp; bee and grasshopper are scarce brother and sister. Well! grubs spin and butterflies do little but flutter, yet they're akin: she's a bonny lass that called herself my sister:" with that he sat down beneath an olive-tree, and looked out upon the heaving waters of the lake. They were dark and deep, yet, in seeming contradiction, sunny and clear; he wondered why they would ever remind him of the full glance of those trustful blue eyes. Then he jumped up, plucked a bough from the olive-tree, and sat down again to wonder why he had plucked an olive-branch; why his hand held a token of peace, while in his heart brooded a thought of war. The light fleecy clouds entangled among the branches of the fir trees on the mountain

tops beyond the lake, seemed to darken and come curling towards him in wreaths of thick black smoke, the plashing of the waters to lose its harmony and become a clang of engines in his ear: the chirp of the cicadas altered to their whirr, and quickened every moment; still the blue eyes looked out upon him trustful and calm from the lake; he frowned, then smiled—at last rose and wandered under the olives back to the village on the brink of the lake, under the shadow of a huge dismantled tower.

The little parlour of the Albergo del Gran San Giulio del Lago, which he had left unoccupied, seemed upon his return to be filled with guests; and filled it was, considering its dimensions, though by no more than a party of four young men. Three sealskin knapsacks, and one of cow's hide, were piled upon one table, garnished with straw hats and alpenstocks; whilst at another were seated the owners, munching little rolls of maize bread, and flinty fragments of real "Parmeggiano," washed down, not without wry faces, by a thick red fluid, of wonderful astringent qualities, dignified by mine host with the pompous name of Vino del Monte Caldo.

"Oh! for a glass of port!" exclaimed one of the party, a strong built undersized young Englishman, whose thorough John Bullism had not been shaken one atom by his journey to the Lake of Garda.

"Bother port—porter for me," answered a second, a strapping youth, who had pulled "stroke" in the boat of his own college, but had been deposed for a tendency to corpulence not compatible with that honourable and laborious office.

"Ah! Digby," chimed in a third, "you are thinking of the porter at the Vine in old Alma Mater, I'll warrant. I can forgive you that; but as to Trelawney's eternal grumble for port, I've no sympathy for it; with *him* its part of a system—he'd grumble at port wine in Oporto, for want of an English mahogany and cut-glass decanters. Would you believe it, we almost came to blows this morning because I couldn't swallow a story about a lemon-tree in his father's garden in Cornwall, which he swore grew finer fruit than those at the Villa Sommariva on the Lake of Como!"

"I declare, that in Cornwall"—— began Trelawney; but his declaration was drowned in the shout of laughter of his three companions.

"I wonder," quoth Digby, of the wide girth, "whether these fishermen fellows pull on this style of drink—why it must be worse in some ways than the gingerbeer and ale old Davis used to serve out at Sandford lock. I should like to know how it suits them; they pull a decentish oar for foreigners, only too slow upon the feather. I can't speak much Italian, but I've a mind to ask that young native in the corner, who would not make a bad 'four,' by the way, in a heavyish crew."

The latter part of this speech had reference to the young man who had plucked the olive-bough by the lake side, and who was sitting apart in a corner of the room, twirling the said olive-bough between his fingers, and dropping the leaves which he picked from it one by one upon the floor.

"I say, *ditemi Signor*," began Digby, rising from the table.

"You may spare your Italian, sir," answered the other; "I am an Englishman."

Digby, somewhat abashed, was about to offer an apology, when Trelawney struck in—"Oh! if you're an Englishman, and not prejudiced like these fellows, and have ever been in Cornwall, I wish you would give us your opinion about"——

"But," said he, "I have never been in Cornwall, and so, I fear, am no judge." Whereupon Trelawney was silent.

After a pause the conversation was renewed by the offer of their fourth companion, a somewhat older and graver character than the three who had already spoken, to lend the strange Englishman a newspaper, produced from his knapsack. The offer was at first declined; but upon intelligence that there was an account of a Chartist riot, was eagerly accepted. Digby and Trelawney here went out, according to their invariable custom—they were both distinguished professors of the natatory art, and initiated members of a swimming-club renowned at Eton and at Oxford—proceeded to enjoy the delights of a bathe by sunset in the sapphire waves of Garda. Of the two Oxonians who remained in the parlour, the younger produced a cigar-case: extracting thence with care and discrimination a promising "weed," he lighted it, and was soon absorbed in the delicate task of forming accurate rings of smoke with his mouth, puffing great whiffs through his nostrils for vexation when they proved imperfect. The elder, Ingram by name, a first-class man of the year before, drew from his pocket a small edition of Catullus, and, as became so scholarlike a character, read intensely. Not so intensely, however,

as the stranger to whom he had lent his old newspaper; *he* read as if his soul was in every line, and as he read, one might have traced upon his expressive countenance the varied emotions which the subject roused within his breast. At one moment his eye would light with a warm, strong light, and his brow seem to expand; suddenly, his lips would close more firmly, his breathing quicken, his brow knit, and his hand clench. He was no ordinary reader of newspapers, that was plain—even to the listless smoker, who began to eye him with curiosity and attention, and was fain by smoking more leisurely and whiffing more sparingly to thin the fragrant veil which intercepted sight of him.

Whilst he scans the countenance and general appearance of the stranger, which seemed to puzzle him the more he dwelt upon it, I may take the opportunity of doing by him as he is doing to another. He was a young man of twenty or thereabout, of well-knit though rather slender figure, tall and graceful, with features of almost feminine beauty and regularity. If any faults were to be found with his face, they lay in the voluptuous expression of the lip, and the slightly sunken appearance of the large hazel eye. His hands, which with his feet were very small, were remarkable for softness and whiteness, almost matching those of his neck, partly exposed by the open collar of his silk jersey. There was a listlessness about his air and attitude in striking contrast with the bearing of the man on whom his scrutinizing gaze was fixed. The difference between their ages might have been of some three years, the stranger being evidently the elder. About his countenance and attitude there was nothing of the languor and

listlessness of the Oxonian. His high forehead rose above eyes of grey, gifted with a keenness and brilliancy not usual to that colour; his features were broadly and boldly carved; the massive lower jaw giving the whole a character of firm and almost dogged determination. The sun of Lombardy had so browned his cheeks that one could scarce have said whether they were pale or ruddy, but they were decidedly spare of flesh. His chest, deep and broad, would have given Digby promise of sound wind in a "spirt;" his shoulders, rather bowed, made him seem shorter than he really was; one might have been surprised to hear that he stood near upon six feet when upright; even Digby, a connoisseur in the animal frame, might have lost a wager on the point. His hands, as the smoker, aware of his own advantages, failed not to remark, were well-shapen though large; but as to whiteness or softness, they were very far from laying claim to either: sooth to say they were the chief point about him to which his observer objected; he felt misgivings as to the gentlemanly qualifications of a man whose hands were of such doubtful hue.

"Well, Windlesham, my boy," said Digby, as he entered the room, still glowing from the bath, "you should have seen me take a 'header' from the cliff below, near the olive-trees. What d'ye think I've been at ever since, and how many cigars have you consumed meantime?"

"Three," answered Windlesham; "but as to guessing what such a fellow has been at this last hour, it passes me—trying bad Italian on the landlord's daughter, perhaps."

"Not I; I've had a long interview with her respected

father though, and taxed my knowledge of the language severely."

"And pray, what may have been the object of this protracted conference?"

"Oh! I wanted to make the fellow understand that we were open to pull a four-oar match with their fishermen here, a mile round Sermione and back (you to steer of course), if we could only get that English chap to take an oar with us."

"Well, what said mine host?"

"I couldn't make out, to tell the truth; but he asked if that 'altero Signor Inglese' was a 'milordo' as well as we?"

"And you said"——

"That you were the only 'milordo' of our lot, to be sure, and that I could say nothing of the other man—'Not knowing, can't say'—that's what I tried to put into Italian, but I don't think it paid. What is that fellow, though—did you make out after we went?"

"He beats me hollow," answered Windlesham; I watched him during two cigars, slow smoking, and make less of him now than I did at first."

"Odd fish!" quoth Digby, "reads a newspaper as hard as Ingram did ethics his last term."

"And makes faces of which I should hope Ingram was guiltless," said the other.

"Should think he was a Cambridge man," opined Trelawney, who was bottling a green lizard in spirits of wine; he was obliged to allow it was a species rare in Cornwall.

"Very likely," said Windlesham. "He doesn't wash his hands much."

"Some sizar," again suggested Trelawney, "awful in mathematics."

"He read through the whole account of the riots," said Ingram, "thanked me for pointing it out, and muttered something about trampling on the rights of the people, and a day of retribution."

"Depend upon it, then, he *is* a Cambridge man," said Trelawney, "and a rascally radical—there's no end of radicals at Cambridge, I know."

Mr. Trelawney's "governor," it may be observed, when high sheriff for the county, had got his head laid open by a brickbat on a certain occasion at Truro assizes; as there had been some political excitement afloat, Sir Charles Trelawney, who gloried in his attachment to fine old English principles, had attributed his mishap to radical malice. This occurrence had given an extra dash of acerbity to the family politics, and doubtless exercised some influence upon the heir of Polgarthen in his selection of the epithet "*rascally*," in conjunction with the word "radical."

"If he is a Cambridge fellow," said Digby, still intent upon his prospective four-oar match, "he is likely to pull a bit."

"Pull you the bell, old fellow," interrupted Windlesham, "or holloa for the cameriere, since bellropes are unknown, and see if we can't get a bit of supper before we give up ourselves a prey to the 'industrious fleas' of the Gran San Giulio."

"Supper by all means," assented Ingram.

"Ay, supper, old fellow," added Trelawney; whereupon Digby, with lungs worthy the ex-stroke of St. Sylvester's, shouted out for the cameriere.

Meanwhile the object of their surmises was keeping by the moonlit shore of the lake an agitated and feverish night-watch. The intelligence conveyed by Ingram's old newspaper was not for him mere news to be skimmed over and forgotten. For him the very heading of the article to which his attention had been drawn, had an intensity of meaning beyond what might be supposed to lie in the words. "Riots in ——shire—admirable conduct of the military—two men shot." For "riot," he read "insurrection;" for "military conduct," "mercenary oppression;" and for "rioters shot," "British citizens murdered." It is plain that could Trelawney have taken a peep into the young man's mental dictionary, he would have been inexpressibly confirmed in his opinion both as to the radicalism and the rascality of the supposed Cantab. Be that as it may, many were the hours of that sweet Italian night which beheld the excited watcher pacing to and fro beneath the olive-trees, halting at one time with an air of proud defiance, as if to await the onslaught of a foe; at another, striding fiercely forwards and waving his arm, as if to lead on and encourage followers to a daring attack. It was plain that his emotions had fairly mastered him; and the host of the Gran San Giulio, had he been waking and abroad, would have failed to recognise, in his altered demeanour, the young Englishman, whose ordinary phlegm and gravity had hitherto seemed to him as passing those of all his grave and phlegmatic countrymen.

CHAPTER II.

A BOOKBINDER IN THE SNOW—A MOTHERLESS GIRL.

THEY were no ordinary eyes of blue that had seemed to look upon the young man out the Lake of Garda. Lustrous, and of open gaze as the shining and wide expanse of the waters, they had its depth and calm. Arched over by dark brows, and fringed with long dark lashes, they gave sweetness to a white forehead that might else have been almost stern, surmounting so marked a profile as that of Clara Jerningham. The colouring of the whole face was warm and rich, in good keeping with the heavy silken braids of gold-brown hair which set it off: beneath these braids nestled small and exquisitely shaped ears: the head, itself well proportioned, was admirably set upon a graceful neck and shoulders: the chest deep: the figure almost tall, and in every respect good. This Clara of the blue eyes was (I crave the pardon of romantic readers for my abruptness) the daughter of a London bookbinder, from whom her eyes had their colour and their calm; their depth and passion were from her mother, an Italian of the pure old southern blood. Both father and mother were now

sleeping their death sleep in old England, though he had lived to see the child whose birth had cost him the wife of his bosom, grow to a stately maiden of some eighteen years. His hour had come three years before this tale begins; and grievous as indeed it was to leave his Clara, he found consolation in the hope of meeting again her mother, his own dear Benedetta. A heart that keeps love fresh and warm through eighteen weary years of memory of the dead, is worth something, though it beat but in the breast of a London tradesman; and a brave, kind, human heart had beaten in truth in the breast of Willie Jerningham. Its bravery and its kindness had won him his Benedetta, in a way quite singular enough to be recorded. He too, when a young man, had trodden the soil of Italy, not for mere pleasure, though not without pleasure heartfelt and intelligent. He had been employed by a gentleman, one of the true breed of the almost extinct Biblio-maniacs, to gather for him in the towns of Italy rare and curious editions of old works. His patron, an old employer of his father, a plain bookbinder, had not failed to remark that young Jerningham had improved to the utmost his casual acquaintance with such books as his father's workshop had thrown in his way; and that, moreover, he had a marked taste for collecting, with a correct judgment in classifying, typographical specimens. Willie, therefore, was sent to Italy, to search for and secure such works as might prove worthy additions to his patron's library. There was not perhaps a town of importance from Calabria to the Alps which he did not visit, whose by-lanes he did not thread, whose bookstalls he did not ransack; and

many a valuable consignment was made by him to London, through the English house at Leghorn, on which he had brought his first letters of credit, and which still supplied him with sufficient funds for his judicious purchases and moderate travelling expenses.

All things, however, have an end; so at last had Willie's book-gathering; and he was now fated to stumble upon a treasure that could scarce find a place on his patron's bookshelves; yet it proved a book to Willie, full of deep meaning, resplendent with illuminations, and the binding a masterpiece beyond the art of any human binder.

This was the manner of its discovery. He had obtained leave from his patron, and money, without which the leave would have been a dead letter, to visit Switzerland afoot before his return to England; and it so fell out that he had been passing a certain night at the hospice on the Grimsel. He had spent so pleasant a time with the two monks, who in those days resided there during the long winter months, that it was not until near noon of the following day that he took leave of them to cross the Furca pass to Réalp, thence to rejoin the great St. Gothard road. He was alone; but as the distance is not great, and he had before been over the same ground, he felt no anxiety at the absence of a guide. The day was cloudy, but not overdark, although there was in the aspect of the sky some threatenings of a snowdrift. The little cottage by the Rhone glacier was deserted; upon the rising slopes near it, Willie startled a solitary chamois, which, as it bounded off across the ice, left to the scene a feeling of complete solitude, of which the wayfarer had not been

conscious until the presence of another living thing had given him a momentary companionship, of which its sudden flight robbed him as soon as given. Willie sped on lustily, resting however in his upward climb to watch the grey clouds gather round the peak of the Finster Aarhorn, to lend a reverent ear to the unbroken silence, or to catch the echoes of some thundering sound which now and then would break it suddenly. But the clouds, which had gathered behind him, were now moving on as he moved, were nearing him as he reached the summit of the pass, had almost caught him in their misty embrace as he struck down into the glens that lead on to Réalp. By and by large flakes of snow began to fall, dancing down like feathers and settling upon his plaid; then came a finer shower, which darkened all the air, and as it fell fast, driven by a keen cold wind, the footpath and the goat-tracks soon disappeared, and the roaring of the torrent was Willie's only guide. Onward he hurried; his sense of hearing, which alone could help him now, stretched to an unusual pitch of keenness, enabled him to keep with sufficient steadiness a path parallel to the running stream. Suddenly, a shrill cry seemed to pierce the thick and thickening atmosphere; at first he thought his tingling ears had played him false; he hardly dared to halt, lest the cold should benumb his limbs; but the second cry which reached him was too clear and withal too agonizing to let him doubt any farther,—it was a human voice, above him and on his left.

With such a heart as his, it needed not a moment's thought—there was some other being in sorer plight than even he—what matter cold and darkness?—life for

life; Willie would save him if the Lord allow it so. He gave a loud long whoop as he struck up the steep ascent upon the left, and a third cry, which startled him from its seeming nearness, was the answer. The snow began to deepen; it was over his ancles as he kept along the stream. Suddenly, upon lifting his foot from a stone which had given it a firm resting-place, it sunk knee-deep as he set it down. It was well-nigh a hopeless struggle onwards; the drift blinded him. A fourth and fainter cry,—it was little more than a loud sigh,—came up from beneath his very feet. He pressed, or rather stumbled forward, stretching out his arms as if by instinct, and found, thank God! that they had grasped a human frame.

That it was light and slender, so light and slender as to be, beyond doubt, a child's, was all he could ascertain. The presence of a child argued that of some other person; and Willie, moreover, was troubled to know whether a child's weak cry could have reached him as did that which had turned him from his path. But the little creature was speechless now, and Willie in vain groped about, and in vain shouted; neither touch nor hearing revealed the presence of any other thing living or once endowed with life. One thing was certain, the child's heart still beat strongly. Could he but find the stream once more, and by its guidance reach Réalp, one life was saved, and help might be got there to prosecute a further search. But if the stream was to be regained and Réalp reached, there must be little more delay, for his head was dizzy with the cold, and his limbs would scarce do their office clogged as they were with snow. So, lifting the little found-

ling in his arms, Willie made the best of his way downwards again, and was wonderfully guided, as if by an unseen but active power, till again the roar of the dashing water fell upon his ear, and he resumed his parallel march. Meanwhile the snow drift thinned, and the large flakes fell again, and then, for all things sped favourably, even these ceased to fall; and the moon began to shed stray beams of silver from behind the fleecy clouds which the wind was driving away.

Then a little red star, like a ruby glowworm, began to glimmer straight ahead; Willie uttered deep words of thankfulness in his innermost heart, and his little burden seemed to grow the lighter and his own blood to gush the warmer as he hurried on. At length he reached a door, which a kind hand opened at his first knock, and the ruddy glow of a cheerful fire showed him for the first time, as he entered, the features of the little girl, whom he had thus rescued and brought safe to Réalp. No sooner had he laid her down, than he would have gone forth to guide the men whom the monk,—for this too was an hospice,—had summoned to go in search of the person whom Willie's first breath had said to be yet missing; this the good brother would by no means suffer, assuring him that they had a guide on whom they could much more safely rely, of which truth he was soon convinced by the deep baying of a noble dog of the St. Bernard's breed.

When Willie awoke from the short but deep sleep which, spite of himself, weighed down his eyelids as soon as he had thrown himself into the great arm-

chair by the fire, he saw the little creature whom he had rescued from the snow, leaning her head upon the monk's knee, and heard her sobbing as if her tiny heart would burst. Poor child! she had good cause to sob and cry. She sobbed because, when the strange men had brought her father in, she had felt the bitter cold, the chilling dampness, of his face and hands; because that dear, dear voice would not answer her passionate and loving appeals; but she was too young to know her full bereavement, neither could she fathom the meaning of the words she had heard them whisper:

"Morto, Signor Padre!"

She looked from the monk to Willie, and from Willie to the door, through which they had carried out that which she knew not to be a corpse; and then she called in a frenzy of grief for her "caro carissimo Padre," till her sobs and cries choked her utterance. She wept on silently, and at last fell into the stillness of heavy sleep. When morning came, no one in Réalp could give any clue to the history of the dead man. That he was an Italian was evident from his dress and from the language of the little girl; that he was poor was no less evident from the little coin found upon his person. All they could gather from the child herself was that he was her father, she his "piccola Benedetta," and that they had come together from some place far, far away. No one, therefore, interfered with Willie when he said that he would accept the charge that the Lord had thus laid upon him, and take the little foundling with him to his own home beyond the sea.

So it came to pass that, three months after, the little dark-haired, dark-eyed maid had dried her tears, and was the merriest playmate that Willie's cousins had ever found, under his own father's roof in smoky London.

Until Benedetta was a woman fully grown, and she was so at an early age, no one could have thought less than did Willie himself that the day would come when he and the little foundling should love one another with lovers' love; but the day did come for all that, and never, perhaps, was there deeper, truer love between any two. When matters came to a crisis, and both knew the truth, and either had shown the heart's secret to other, there was no question of marriage settlement to delay their happy union. Bookbinding was a fair trade, as things then went, and Willie could earn enough to share a full meal at all times with his young wife. His former patron, Mr. Wymer by name, was among his most constant and liberal employers; but he was more to the young couple than even this, he was a true friend and no unfrequent companion. I should have premised that Mr. Wymer was reckoned eccentric in the choice of his acquaintance by the stiffly respectable section of his equals. So Willie's kith and kin predicted some advancement for him, when they read in the newspapers the death of Mr. Wymer's elder brother, a baronet and a bachelor.

Pleasant were the sunny glades and uplands of sweet Wymerton Place, pleasant the shadowy depths of its old oak woods. The prickly brushwood and the tall wild fern swept about the old-fashioned trimly-kept gardens that surrounded the house, as a boisterous

sea sweeps round some quiet green isle; nor is this comparison inapt to give a notion of the several proportions of the gardens and of the wilder expanse beyond. The more immediate "appurtenances of the mansion," as Sir Jeffrey himself would call them, covered many a broad acre, and the distant forest land formed the line of the horizon, turn which way you would upon the stone terraces of the garden. Wild as it was, the forest was not tenantless; stately deer ranged undisturbed; countless hares and rabbits gambolled near them; playful squirrels skipped from bough to bough amidst the old oak trees and beeches; many a lanky heron had her fishing station in the reeds of the mere; and the woodcock and snipe in winter knew of many a soft and mossy spring in the coppices.

The house itself was built in the reign of Queen Bess by young Henry Wymer, not with his own gold; he was the younger son of a house not wealthy, though of gentle blood; but Master Harry's laughing eyes, clustering brown curls, burly, yet active figure, his good seat on horseback, or, perhaps, his thorough, hearty and frank good humour, had won him the smiles, the graces, and loving little heart of Alice Gaisford, the only daughter of a wealthy alderman in the ward of Chepe. With her broad pieces had Master Harry built Wymerton House, in the substantial and withal fantastic style of his day.

In course of time, the elder branches of the old stock of the Wymers, who affected in good sooth to treat Harry's wealthy little Alice with becoming loftiness and condescension,—these topping branches, as it often

happens, lost sap and withered; and the new honours of the ancient house sprung up from that stem which grew a little lower down; so that Harry's house proved the ark of the Wymers, which even the deluge of the Civil Wars could never wreck; and Harry's descendants were the only Wymers known after the Restoration. Little Alice, or rather her memory, outlived all the haughtiness of her supercilious connexions; at Wymerton, in after years, many a laughing, sunny, fair-haired child had learned to lisp her name as it pointed to the ancient, yet sweet and pleasant portrait that hung in the great hall. There was too, in the left wing of the house, facing the choicest garden nook, a little room wainscotted with carved oak panels and alternate strips of mirror, said to be of Venetian workmanship. This little room still bore her name, and still her intricate and curious cabinet stood undisturbed in its old corner; and very precious and sacred in the eyes of all the childish tribe were the gems and baubles that slept in its many drawers, of which rare glimpses were vouchsafed to longing eyes at Christmastide, or on some other day of high and festive import.

Having said so much, I will leave all further description of the house and gardens to the imagination of my readers; for, altered and altering as our England is, few perhaps cannot call to mind some such place as Wymerton; and I well know that in the memory of those who can, no art of description will avail to recall any other than the identical picture which is framed there already.

To such a place was Willie Jerningham summoned by his old friend and patron soon after his

succession to the baronetcy. Wymerton had long been untenanted save by a few domestics, whom Sir Richard, Jeffrey's elder brother had left years ago in possession; for this Richard had been a wanderer and voluntary exile almost since the day when his father had breathed his last; an agent, upon whom the tenants had in all that time never learned to look with any feelings but of aversion, had in his days administered the estate. Jeffrey, although himself somewhat eccentric in mind and manner, was a kindly hearted and generous man, one who, considering his long celibacy, had what may be called strong domestic habits and feelings. He rejoiced to think that in the exercise of these he could look forward to spending a quiet remainder of life in the old house, of which throughout youth and manhood he had ever preserved the warmest and tenderest recollections. Accordingly, the elder tenants of the estate, who had kept the remembrance of Master Jeffrey alive in some corner of their hearts, were overjoyed to hear of his return among them; others, from their accounts and from the hopefulness of every such change of masters, entered partly into their joy; whilst all in concert exulted over the cool and ceremonious dismissal with which the agent had at once met from the new baronet. Among the very first arrangements undertaken at his residence by Sir Jeffrey, was the ordering and enlarging of the library, into which, although a room of noble proportions, he at once resolved to throw the adjoining chamber. Without some such enlarging, he would have been sorely at a loss to house his own admirable collection; for, well proportioned as the old

library was, it was equally well filled; and so great an addition as Sir Jeffrey brought to its stores must needs enforce an addition to the storehouse. Moreover, there was a great work to be done, in drawing up a complete and correct catalogue of the original library, for which undertaking no farther or better materials were found, after diligent search, than an imperfect and mutilated manuscript, the handiwork of a family chaplain, some eighty years back or more. This decided Sir Jeffrey. He had suspected beforehand that he should find himself in need of Willie Jerningham, and now he found that he could not do without him. Upon the very day of the discovery of the manuscript, he wrote off a summons to Willie, who shortly made his appearance at Wymerton. Sir Jeffrey's note, however, had been hurried, and Willie had not gathered from it the magnitude of the work he was to undertake or the length of time it must necessarily consume. His father had not been dead many months, and Willie had succeeded to his business as a bookbinder; he would be endangering his custom if he were himself to be so long absent from the workshop. But more than this, there was his darling Benedetta, to whom a year's wedded companionship had but bound him more nearly and dearly: how was either of them to endure so prolonged a separation? All this Willie duly laid before his patrón, between whom and himself an unreserved confidence long since existed; so, after a day's deliberation, it was decided by Sir Jeffrey, that the bookbinding was to be given up, that Benedetta was to join her husband at Wymerton, and that the pretty cottage in the forest, about a

quarter of a mile from the house, was to be occupied by the Jerninghams; the head keeper, a creature of the obnoxious agent, having received, some time previously, notice to quit. From that time forward Jerningham was installed, in name, as librarian to the worthy baronet, but in deed, as a kind of factotum and universal referee in all matters connected with the internal arrangements of the old house. As for the little cottage in the forest, it soon became, under the care of Benedetta, a near approach to the perfection of a rustic dwelling-place.

Easy, gentle, and happy, were the two short years she spent here with her husband, two years whose sunshine served to lighten all the gloom of Willie's after-life, which gloom itself was but the prolonged twilight that followed their sun-setting. Poor Willie's heart was too affectionate to be soured as some hearts have been by such a loss; and his little Clara found its love almost as deep and warm for her as it had been for the mother, at cost of whose life she drew her own breath. Yet the father's smile, as he bent down to his daughter's kiss, was like a gleam from behind a sorrowful cloud; and this the child, who at first was only gladdened by the brightness, learned, with a child's quick perception, to discern, and, with the inquiring spirit of a child, longed to understand. Often would she ponder deeply over the cause of her father's sadness, and many a time was the question hanging upon her lips that was to probe the soreness of his wound.

It fell out, upon one balmy evening in the summer, that William and his daughter had climbed a wooded

eminence that overlooked the forest lake on one hand, whilst on the other, far beyond the ample boundaries of Wymerton, lay a richly cultivated plain, watered by a broad and tranquil stream. They sat down upon the tufted grass, in a spot where two overarching trees in the foreground framed an admirable landscape. There was upon the surface of the broad plain spread beneath them, and along the banks of the river, a calm, a beauty, and a stillness, which seemed to hush the voices both of father and of child. The two sat there as in a trance, drawing in the sweet breath of the evening, which brought them the fragrance of newly-mown fields, and watching the decline of the sun, arrayed in a setting splendour such as an English sky displays but seldom.

"Oh, Father, dear," the ringing voice of Clara at length burst in upon the silence, "did you ever, now, *ever* see such a lovely sunset?"

"It is beautiful, my child," he answered. But his daughter was not so easily satisfied.

"Now, tell me quite true, Father, dear," she rejoined, "did you ever see one so beautiful before?"

"Yes, dearest, I have seen a sunset more beautiful, far more beautiful than even this."

"Was it here, then?" persisted the child, "here at Wymerton, and was it long ago?"

"Not here, Clara, but far, far away, in another country, and a long, long while ago."

Silently, but with irresistible gush, the tears came welling up into his eyes as he spoke. It did, in truth, seem to him a far off land of which he thought; the distance multiplied by the many years through which

the reminiscence had glanced back, years which themselves lay beyond the desolate tract between the present and the past. It seemed, as he mused on, to be a distance immeasurable, almost infinite; for his reminiscence lay far beyond the grave of Benedetta, in the days when even she had no existence, at least for him. His thoughts had lighted upon one gorgeous evening when, from a mountain side, he beheld, for the first time, the plains of Lombardy flooded with purple and gold. Lombardy and the Alps, Benedetta and her grave—it were hard indeed to say in what order the thoughts of these were linked together, to say this thought was first, and this as a second brought in this third. But I wot it was not for the sun and sky of Italy, nor for the golden days of travel, nor yet for the brave warm heart of youth, that Willie's tears fell fast; the true soul clung in grief to the green sod of the little grave that was close at hand, beyond the clump of trees yonder, down in the churchyard at Wymerton.

As she saw her father's tears fall, Clara too began to weep bitterly; a happy circumstance, which served to recall him to himself; and in the endeavour to console his daughter he found, unwittingly, consolation for his own bitterness. But the circumstance proved happy in another and more lasting respect. It seemed as if from that day forward the sealed fountain of the father's sorrow was opened to his child; there sprung up between them a confidence and a sympathy such as neither had ever known before. And since his inner heart was no longer shut up from Clara, we may be sure that many things were free to her from henceforth that were not so before. They talked together

often of his early days; and, one by one, the little thoughtful and inquiring girl would draw forth from the storehouse of his memory the tales and adventures of his youth, a charmed time to every man, and of all men to him above others, who during it has been a wanderer. There was, indeed, one passage of his life which, with its surrounding circumstances, Willie was careful to avoid, and Clara was no less careful to keep herself from treading, by some inadvertent question, upon ground which she could surmise was painful to her father. Yet even this reserve and silence were in time done away, and sooner than he could have thought possible. It would have been a marvel could he have talked much of the past with one whom he loved dearly, and not have made mention sooner or later of one whom he had loved, and still did love, more dearly than even her. And so at last he would tell to the anxious, almost breathless, child at his knee, the eventful story of the mountain pass, of the snow-storm, and of the little dark-haired maiden, whom God by his arm had rescued from that awful death. Then would he speak to her of Benedetta as she grew from girlhood to ripe womanhood under his own father's roof; then would he tell of his own love for her, which grew and deepened with her growth, and say how she became his own; how, later, they had lived and loved a little time together; and how, at the last, he had lost her, but hoped to meet her once again. All this Clara loved to hear time after time, and he at length loved as well to repeat. It seemed to him as if he were building up for his dear Benedetta a monument almost worthy of herself, a fair monument grounded in the

heart of their child, which should endure in beauty and in freshness when he too should sleep with his lost one under the quiet green sod of the churchyard. And when the child would burst into tears at the closing of the beautiful but sad tale, and fling her soft arms round his neck, and ask if he truly loved her though her darling mother was away, he would clasp her to his breast, and bow his head in resignation, and bless the name of Him who, though he had "taken away," had yet "given" a very precious after-gift, which day by day he learned to prize more dearly.

These things were not without effect in moulding and shaping the life and character of the child. Having scarcely a companion besides her father, if we except Sir Jeffrey, whom also she loved dearly in return for his great kindness and indulgence towards her; living, as it has been seen, much in the remembrance of the past, and under the shadow of a grief deep though gentle, she grew up thoughtful, observant, and sensitive; but there was also in her temperament a warmth and liveliness of imagination, an ardour of thought and sentiment, inheritance of her mother's southern blood, which combined to give her energy and boldness, and stood out in admirable though sometimes startling relief from her otherwise even and tranquil cast of character.

As time went on these latter qualities took greater development; though Willie did his best, the kind of education Clara received, wanting in the inestimable advantage of female guidance and the gentle influence of a mother's control, allowed them to shoot up into a growth almost unhealthy. Her mind was

not what may be fairly called barren of solid acquirements; she had digested too much of the contents of the old library for that; but though she had never read the trash with which the diseased palates of some young minds are surfeited, her studies had been irregular, and at times wild and strange. Books of travel and adventure by land and sea,—faithful transcripts for the most part of the eventful days in which old Harry Wymer and his Alice, and their immediate successors, had played their part upon the stage of life,—these were amongst the earliest, as they were the most constant companions of her reading hours. And who, if I may dare ask it of my reader, has not felt a strange mysterious stirring of the heart as he has pored over volumes such as these? Where is the page of history which has an interest more thrilling than that which speaks of those great days? For they were days when there was an awakening in the thoughts of man. The bands were then but recently burst which had bound the faith of Christendom to the footstool of the Roman Pontiff. Great-hearted adventurers went north and south, and east and west; the old world heard that other worlds lay unexplored beyond the girdle of the ocean on every side. It seemed as if a brother feeling were between these men and the adventurers on the great seas of reason and of faith. The old chivalrous aspect of Europe still covered the times; yet it had begun to sit on them very loosely, worn as a mask rather than a vizor. There was much true grandeur, perhaps, withal, too much magniloquence; but even this seems to us now excusable, and the pomp of language is not condemned as excessive for events

which loom so large through the distance of three centuries.

But to return to Clara. Her mind was thus imbued early and deeply with a spirit of romance free from the twaddle which so often usurps that name. Still she was too much of a dreamer. Her longing for distant travel soon became intense. As it may be supposed, the land to which her quick desires and imaginings were ever turning was that land of Italy, of which the recollection glowed yet so warm and bright in her father's bosom. Its history became her study, its aspect the subject of her endless dreamings. To her, of course, the decrepitude of that mysterious land was a thing unknown; she saw it through the prism of her own fancy, as her father through that of his memory, and there was one title which it yet seemed to retain, and in which she gloried, according to her interpretation of it: Italy she heard of as the Land of Song. As such, she felt she had a double right to hail it as her motherland, for the gift of song was truly her own. She had an exquisite ear for harmony. From earliest childhood the natural music of the birds, the winds, the waters, and of all the quire of flood and field, had charms for her deeper than she could express. When, in time, the science of the concord of sweet sounds began to reveal itself to her astonished and delighted sense and mind, she found with joy within herself a wondrous power of translating it; an organ clear, deep, flexible, and far-reaching—there was not a thrush at Wymerton who was a sweeter singer than Willie's daughter. From Sir Jeffrey himself she acquired her knowledge of what may be strictly called music, in which he was

no mean proficient; and the fact that he had derived his own from a somewhat formal and pedantic school, was an advantage to Clara, whose wild discursive taste and genius required some such cramping and fetters.

The years came and went peacefully for the more part, and uneventfully, until Clara's eighteenth birthday. Not many weeks after it her father was attacked by a severe complaint, and soon felt that the time was come when he also must die. Beyond the door of the sick chamber I will not go. He lingered about a month and died, leaving his daughter to the care of a female relative; whilst as regards provision for her maintenance, his own savings had been considerable, and to these the unfailing friendship and generosity of his patron added a sum sufficient to place Clara beyond the reach of want, or even of anxiety.

CHAPTER III.

COUSIN MARTHA—VOCATION—A SERENADE.

MISS MARTHA HOBSON owned and inhabited a neat little cottage at Camden Town. Short, stout, and hazel-eyed, she had long since replaced by a well-executed "front" the wavy brown ringlets that had once adorned her good-humoured countenance. Her face was calm as a pond, with something of a pond's dulness; on it her temper was reflected with exactitude. The storm of passion never had swept across it; at the very utmost a breeze of sentiment had now and then raised a ripple on the surface. In virtue of her suburban residence she was wont to consider herself gifted with the superior knowledge of men and manners common to dwellers in vast and populous cities. In virtue of her occasional visits to her cousin Willie at Wymerton, she was wont, among citizens, to claim a knowledge of rustic matters far surpassing the ken of cockneys. Sooth to say, cockneys and country-folk alike would smile at either pretension; and would have laughed outright, but for the thorough good nature and kindly warmth of heart of the self-deceived Martha.

As children, cousin Willie had called her his little wife; but she soon forgave him his devotion to Benedetta, whom she too loved and admired, after her fashion, during life; and whose death she sincerely mourned. She was at Willie's bedside at his last hour, and as she promised, at his request, to care for Clara when he should be gone, the promise was made with a fervour and depth of feeling which seemed beyond her usual placid temperament.

The promise thus made was kept with genuine truth; she had conferred a benefit upon her own heart by making it, its best affections were henceforth concentrated and intensified; her judgment, however, fell soon, as it was to be expected, under the complete domination of the aspiring, energetic, and determined will of her adopted child. Clara found in Cousin Martha, not a guide, but an affectionate and submissive follower. It was, perhaps, a misfortune for such as she.

Some months were passed in quiet by Clara at Camden Town; her time beguiled by music and books, the fever of her imagination cooled by grief and the fresh remembrance of her great loss. After that time the spirit of the young enthusiastic dreamer again began to ferment, and at length occurred an event, which, in giving increased ardour to her imagination, gave direction and irresistible impulse to her desire. Sir Jeffrey Wymer, who, in his seldom visits to London, never forgot his little favourite, as he still called Clara, bethought himself by chance upon one occasion, of the pleasure, which as a practised musician, she could hardly fail to reap from an evening spent at

the Queen's Theatre; accordingly Clara found herself that same night, for the first time in life, within the walls of an opera house.

The spaciousness of the house itself, the dazzling brilliancy of its lights, the crowd, the splendour of their dress, were rapidly and with pleasure noticed by Clara, but failed to seize upon her attention at first. Sir Jeffrey, who watched her countenance with the keen shrewdness of an old observer, was astonished and almost disconcerted by her self-possession. At a few glances she seemed to have mastered a scene so new and so strange to her; her look and attention seemed to fall carelessly back into the box, and she resumed the thread of a conversation which they had been holding in the carriage, as quietly as if they were seated again together in the old and well-known library at Wymerton. Sir Jeffrey was puzzled; he thought her strangely altered, and doubted whether to pronounce Clara insensible to any or superior to ordinary emotion. By and by he was enabled to form a more correct judgment. With the first notes of the overture her whole aspect changed, she became the very breathing image of meditative inquiry; with neck and head inclined forward, brow almost lowering, lips compressed, she seemed to be seeking in the phrases of the introduction the plot, the conduct, the catastrophe of the drama. As it closed, her inquiry seemed in a measure satisfied; the muscles of the neck relaxed, the brow was smoothed, the lips parted to allow of freer respiration; in short, attitude and expression regained much of their wonted composure when the curtain drew up. Sir Jeffrey had seen enough by that time to convince him that Clara

was no more impassible than he had ever known her; but throughout the evening he still found himself perplexed, and his powers of accurate observation partly baffled. At times every fibre of Clara's frame seemed to be under the spell of harmony; she leaned back in the box, more than half closed her eyes, and seemed by her breathing to count time, and follow the accentuation of the music; but at others, the music seemed to be forgotten or unheeded, and her glance went to and fro, in quick alternation from the stage to the body of the house, which now for the first time seemed to claim a place in her thoughts. Even at the most critical point of the drama, which was one of more than mere musical interest, her companion remarked, that whilst the oldest opera-goers in the house were intent upon the action of the play, her gaze, and evidently her mind with it, was fixed not upon the actors, but upon the mass of eager, breathless spectators; nor did it turn again until the prima donna was leaving the stage, when Clara shot a keen and anxious glance towards her, and seemed to wish that it could follow her into the side scenes. In the intervals between the acts she said little, and when she answered any question it was with apparent effort to recall her attention. Sir Jeffrey was not one of those observers who, when they espy a movement amongst the wheels and clock-work of another person's mind, must needs, like a curious baby, begin to pull the thing about, and put fingers in to find out the secret of the stir; so he left his young friend pretty much to her own thoughts, and during the ride home was careful not to put the trivial, but as he felt it would

be, the embarrassing question, "Well, Clara, how did you like it?"

Busy enough, in truth, were her thoughts, not only during the long ride home, but during the whole of that night, memorable in her history. She had found a name for her vague aspirations of many years; her indefinite longings began thenceforward to shape themselves into definite desires; she began to understand the word vocation; she had found a sphere of action in which to exercise her twofold gifts of energy and harmony. When morning dawned upon her sleepless eyes, Clara was, in will and determination, thenceforward an artist, actress, and musician.

Dreamer though she was, there was no deception in the estimate she had formed of her own powers; she had, as it is known already, the soul and the organ of a singer, sweet and powerful; and the other gift, more subtle but less noble, the power of riveting the minds of others by gesture, tone and look, the art of swaying passions by their mimicry, was no less truly in her, as she had rightly guessed upon the very first occasion when she had seen that art in practice, that power in exercise. There was this difference, too, between her and a dreamer of the vulgar stamp, she could perceive at once and seize upon the means which should work out her end; she could not only think of doing, but could do. Deeply conscious of her own genius, she knew right well that it must needs be fettered for a time, must stoop to learn the mechanism of an art, in order one day with safety and assurance to overmaster all mere conventionalism, and to break with impunity the chains to which it had consented for

awhile. Clara forthwith betook herself to serious study. But her resolve once fully formed, brought back into her mind an old long-cherished idea, now practical, and consistent with her whole design: she would visit Italy, and in the nursing land of arts train herself to be an artist.

Oh, how the pitiable and the ludicrous, confused and yet distinguishable, were huddled up together on the countenance of cousin Martha, like the ill-blending streaks of colour upon a painter's palette, as he throws aside his brushes for the day, when Clara first announced to her that within three weeks they two must be at Milan; not only this, but also with what purpose and to what end she had determined upon such a journey. Poor Martha, she felt as one may suppose a mandrake good-tempered and somewhat humorous to feel when plucked up suddenly by the roots, neither groaning nor laughing, but with a disposition both to laugh and to groan. She felt indeed as completely, as radically plucked up from the genial soil of Camden Town, as if she were already under the marble glare of the Cathedral walls, or in the precincts of La Scala's house of song; for she knew Clara's determination far too well to doubt of its finality, and to question her cousin's will would have seemed to her more strange, if possible, than even this sudden, unlooked-for eradication. When, however, the idea had lost, as in a few days it did, the first blush of startling novelty, cousin Martha adopted it with sufficient cordiality, not being unmindful of the strong additional claims she was likely to acquire by such a journey to be considered a proficient in knowledge of the world. No star of

the social constellation at Camden Town in which Miss Hobson shone, had ever been known to stray so widely from its orbit as the contemplated term of her wanderings.

The task of persuading Sir Jeffrey to consent to this journey, would have proved more difficult than Clara found it, had not the old baronet been well versed in the study of temperament and character. He did not conceal from his young friend the serious objections to her design which he could not fail to entertain. But having once heard her mode of combating them, he readily perceived that if the fight was not to be *à l' outrance*, his old experience and sagacity could be no match in friendly joust for the youthful enthusiasm and glowing energy of Clara. To break with her was to lose all hope of future influence over her career; and he loved her too well to bear with the notion of bringing matters to such a pass: so, having calmly said his say, he bethought him of one last and silent appeal to make to her affections and old associations: he made her agree to spend a month with him at Wymerton Place before her departure from England. What were his precise expectations when he did so, he could hardly define with accuracy even to his own mind; but on one thing he had determined, that if the place should seem to put forth its recent yet old memories, and grapple with and cling about her heart, he would contrive in some way to make the bond between it and her permanent; he would fill her heart and mind with an image of home such as should banish her distant aspirations, if it might be, once and for all.

But Sir Jeffrey knew not, or did not consider, that Wymerton was that one spot in all England which, in Clara's heart, lay nearest to Italy: that in treading its verdant glades her foot seemed almost then to press that glorified soil. With the more vivid image of her lost father, which her old familiar haunts could not fail to recall into her mind, came back with more distinctness, and with a freshening fascination, the remembrance of those glowing descriptions which had charmed the summer walks they had taken side by side, and the long, kindly evenings spent in winter by the hearthstone. But more than this, the very graveslab, whereon the names of Willie and his Benedetta were graven together, and the green mound beneath which her Italian mother and her English sire lay again united, seemed to give, in her excited imagination, a pious sanction to her cherished scheme. Daughter of England and of Italy, she would share her love between them: the one should foster and develop the genius, which should in time adorn and illustrate the other. As the last week of her stay drew on, her old friend saw clearly that his appeal had been made in vain, and three days after the promised month had expired, Clara was at Ostend, with cousin Martha, on their way to Milan.

Resting, as they went up the Rhine, at Coblentz, a spot which may claim, in its own right, a lasting place in the memory of any passer-by, she was witness of a scene which produced a powerful effect upon her mind. During the two days she spent there, she heard a certain name buzzing from mouth to mouth, wherever a knot of persons were gathered

in conversation. On the evening which preceded her intended departure she observed an unusual crowd assembled at the landing place, by the bridge of boats, and as the packet from Mayence paddled up rapidly and swung round, with head against the stream, the name which she had heard whispered about before burst from a hundred lips, and was greeted with a deafening cheer. By-and-by the crowd opened a passage for some individual, of whom she did not succeed in catching sight; but who entered the gateway of the hotel in which she and her companion were residing. The crowd gave him one more cheer as he disappeared under the archway, and then dispersed. This demonstration of popular feeling, quite new to Clara, and no less so, despite her "*savoir vivre*," to her cousin, furnished them with ample room for conjecture, and abundant matter for conversation, during their evening ramble by the banks of the river. On their return to the inn, they learned from the gratified host that the individual whose arrival had been thus greeted by the crowd, and whose presence under his roof that day conferred upon the Hotel des Trois Suisses such enviable distinction, was a musician celebrated for his powers of composition. Clara's enthusiasm was fired at this intelligence, which seemed to ratify, by all the voices of the crowd she had seen that day, the estimate she had formed of her proposed career.

Her evening walk had been long; soon after reaching her room, she half-opened the tall folding window to admit the summer breeze and the rushing rippling sound of the water; then lay down upon a sofa, where, fanned by the one and hushed by the other,

she fell into a sleep, almost as full of dreams as her waking hours of fancy. The images that haunted her were vague and fantastic, borrowed chiefly from the actual and striking occurrence of the afternoon. She saw men, women, and children dressed in unwonted garb, assemble one by one, and gather into knots and groups which swelled, and grew, and joined together, and intermingled, until at length a dense and fluctuating crowd stood gathered before her: the confused humming of their many voices subsided by degrees; there was a momentary stillness, and then a mighty chorus was chanted by them all at once. The volumes of sound rolled majestically away, and then the clear trebles of the women and children alone were heard; and again the dense mass seemed to break up into distinct bodies, which formed in regular and solemn procession, marching past and trampling the ground in measure to the cadences of the chorus, which again pealed forth from every breast. The strange and semi-conscious feeling with which dreams sometimes vanish, when we begin to realize the mockery, when we know it for such, and yet knowing are still influenced by the deception, now stole over Clara's mind; she knew herself to be dreaming, yet felt herself awaking. Still a flood of music was pouring in upon her senses. She stood up, and yet was it scarce wittingly; she listened, and the strain grew familiar; she walked or rather staggered to the window, the chorus still crashing in her ear; there was a pause, she knew it well, it was one of which the stillness was broken in the composition by a thrilling solo, and without the power to control herself, she stepped out on the balcony, and

with a clear impassioned voice took up the strain. Her notes, loud, liquid, and mellow, rang out into the starlit night; her spirit, as that of a Pythoness, seemed wrapped in her melodious song; she knew not of the crowd that stood breathless and wondering beneath. On she sang, gazing at the giant form of the rock of Ehrenbreitstein, watching the lines of silver which the rising moon was gently drawing along the angles of its bastions, until the solo was concluded; and then great was the amaze of eye and ear, as she heard the sound of a hundred instruments, the breath of a hundred voices duly peal again the chorus, and looked down upon the crowd which showed unearthly by the mingled and discordant light of the moon and of the many blazing torches. It was not till the chorus ended, and a loud universal burst of acclamation fully roused her bewildered faculties, that she turned suddenly to retreat into the privacy of her own apartment. In turning she perceived a figure, which she subsequently recognised as that of the artist whom the shouts of the crowd had greeted upon his landing that day. He was standing in a balcony similar and almost contiguous to her own, and he bowed with profound respect as she hastily withdrew, letting the curtain of her window fall.

On board the steamer, next day, soon after they had passed the the smiling terraces of Stolzenfels, this person approached, and craving pardon for interrupting her trance of admiration, begged to thank her for the unexpected incident of the previous night, with the assurance that both he and the good folks of Coblentz had considered her solo as the gem of the musical

garland offered to him by their serenade. Clara was somewhat disconcerted at this notice of her almost involuntary exploit; but, as the stranger had the good taste to intrude no further for the time upon her thoughts, she soon forgot her embarrassment in the enthusiasm created by the wondrous panorama flitting by her on both sides.

No one who knows the Rhine can fail to be struck with the contrast its features suddenly present above the little town of Bingen. The wooded hills and sloping vineyards, which stretch downwards upon Geizheim and Rudesheim, suffer the eye and the mind to sink by gentle degrees from the keen excitement of the steep crags which uphold on either side the legendary tombstones of old Rhenish chivalry, into the calm and still repose of the broad plains and flat verdant islands which form the approach to Mayence. It is between the Bingerloch and Mayence, on a gentle balmy evening, that conversation should begin among fellow-tourists. If the mind be not exhausted, the imagination has been well roused by the day's enjoyment; the tumult of awakened thoughts, subsides under the influence of the change in scenery, of the soothing charm of a glowing twilight, and of the promised stillness of a night whose first clear star begins to twinkle out of the deep vaulted sky; the time is favourable for drawing out their now well-marshalled but still warm and vivid array. This was the time chosen by the Maestro for renewing a conversation with Clara, and there was something in his kind but respectful manner which, apart from these predisposing circumstances, drew her on to enter freely into it. They could not

fail to begin with scenery, the topic of the day; but as a general impression of variety and beauty filled both their minds, irrespective of the objects in detail which had produced it, and as they both were musicians, not painters, they treated of variety, harmony, and beauty, in that expression of them which was familiar to both. Hence it came, that they found themselves at last to be weighing the merits of poetry and music, or rather of the poet and the musician as interpreters of what is beautiful, varied, harmonious, and true.

"The poet speaks truth," said Clara, "robing it with beauty; the musician—the composer I mean, of course—at best can but weave an outer garment of beauty, a superfluous though brilliant garment for the daughter of the poet's brain."

"The musician," quoth the Maestro, "speaks the same truth as the poet, and robes it more beautifully, because more delicately, with a tissue more gorgeous or more simple in loveliness, as the case may be, but always finer."

"Though less transparent, and therefore less useful."

"For shame, Mademoiselle! would you robe truth with transparency, that the truth-hating, unbelieving eye of the vulgar might gaze on her beauties at will? Well, we will not quarrel about that until, at all events, you have confessed that truth is no more the daughter of the poet's brain than of the musician's, or better still, that though she be the daughter of neither, she dwells as willingly in the one as in the other."

"Let that pass, then," said Clara; "but I return to my question of usefulness. When the poet speaks

truth, the multitude are taught forthwith, and hail the truth for truth's sake more than for the expression."

"Mademoiselle has not read much, apparently, of what are called poetical criticisms."

"Never mind the critics; I speak of the multitude, who, even in the latest days, cherish, admire, appreciate the rudest songs of their ancestral poets; not for the expression's sake, which they condemn as barbarous, but for the gems of truth, rough-set in the antiquated expression. Now, your musical crowd—such as the serenaders last night—know nothing of the truth of the music they execute or flock to hear; they see the robes of the fine lady, but the breathing soul upon her countenance is veiled for them; they shout for the beauty of the clothing, not of the person clothed; they creep out of their listlessness to hear, as, I have heard say, lizards crawl out of their holes at the notes of a reed pipe."

"I am not the man to dispute that point at all events, though I might be tempted to uphold my art above all others, if it were but for the sake of the lizards which it will draw forth sometimes upon balconies." Clara smiled. "But you wander from the true point, Mademoiselle, or rather you view matters from a point very different from mine. There is a rabble which gapes upon the work of the poet and shouts applause, and there is just such another which affects to worship the work of the musician; and this is not a thing confined to music or to poetry, but there is rabble upon rabble in this world which will kiss the hem of a saint's garment, and yet love the saint or his sanctity never a whit."

"From what point, then, may I ask, do you view the question?"

"Why, let the rabble be many or few in comparison, I do not take them into account in deciding between poet and musician. Both speak truth,—we exclude the liars on both sides,—more, perhaps, understand it, as spoken by the poet; but the few who understand the musician's truth are of the higher order of intelligences; and, I think, sometimes, that there are exalted truths fit only for these higher intellects, such as I can see but most dimly, and speak yet even more stammeringly, even in the musical tongue—truths which the musical voice alone can communicate, and the musical ear alone receive."

"I have strange notions at times concerning that which the old philosopher called 'the music of the spheres.' Some say he spoke an allegory. I never believed that."

Thereupon both were for awhile silent. At last the Maestro, turning abruptly to Clara, said—

"Pardon me; but you must, I am sure, be a musician. I mean"——

"An artist," she answered; "yes; or rather I am on my way to Italy to become one."

"Is not, then, your estimate of the poet's supremacy treasonable; or would you be poet as well as musician?"

"Would I be? Nay, sir; much as you may ascribe of power to the will, you, of all persons, must feel how little the word 'would' can have to say in this matter. Of course I would be a poet, and, after a sense, I am one, or, at least, fancy it sometimes; but as far as the poet's expression goes, I am tongue-tied."

"Mademoiselle will pardon my incredulity; I have heard her speak poetry this very evening."

"I am tongue-tied," repeated Clara; "therefore, to leave poetry out of the question, I will tell you why I will be a musician. The poet needs no interpreter now-a-days but the printer: as we read, the voice of our own heart becomes the poet's voice, and sings his songs for him within ourselves. It is not so with the composer; his writings are but hieroglyphics, without living meaning, even for the hierophant, until he take up his chaunt, and without the ghost of meaning for the uninitiated. Now, being gifted, not only with intelligence of the musician's meaning, but with an organ to express it, to unfold it before others, a power to make them sharers in my intelligence, I will exercise that power, will follow my vocation—in a word, will be an artist."

"Oh!" said the Maestro, "I feel indeed the truth of what you say; you artists are our necessary mouthpiece; but such artists as you are something far above mouthpieces; for you are they who make us composers understand ourselves."

"Well," interrupted Cousin Martha, "you are both past my understanding; but here is Mayence and the watermills, and the Austrian sentries looking for all the world like millers to correspond; so Clara, dear, we had better see to our shawls and baskets."

CHAPTER IV.

A LIFT ON THE ROAD—THE BANKER'S PARTY—A STRICKEN STUDENT.

THIS Clara, then, was she, whose deep blue eyes would persist in gazing out of the Lake of Garda upon the youth who had likened her to a butterfly, himself, in contrast, to a bee. Some few sunny days by the lake-side, with long, deep, earnest conversations upon matters which both had at heart, had forged a stronger link between them than either could have suspected on the first of those days when a chance threw them together. At the end of these first few days' acquaintance they seemed to be old friends, and to know a great deal of one another already. Indeed, they did so, though there was very much of which they were in strange ignorance. Though each knew by that time many of the innermost thoughts of the other, their singular contrasts and still more singular agreements; yet it is almost doubtful whether Clara knew, on the day after their parting, that her new friend's name was Mark Brandling; and beyond a doubt that she could not have told precisely what his calling was, nor on what business he was in Lombardy. As

for Mark, he was not a little surprised the next morning, to learn from snatches of the Oxonians' conversation, who were breakfasting at the upper end of the table at which he himself was sitting, how much information those ingenious youths had picked up concerning the young lady of whom they had enjoyed at best a glimpse at her departure.

"I wish Ingram had lost his Catullus," said Digby, pausing in his vigorous onslaught on the breakfast; "he's been hammering all the morning at translating an ode into hendecasyllabics, to judge by his puzzlebrain looks."

"Wrong for once, my boy," answered the first-class man; "I hate translations, and haven't looked into Catullus since last night."

"Well, then, you have been concocting an abstruse refutation of Trelawney's theory, concerning the site of the garden of the Hesperides, which he flatters himself to have discovered three miles from his father's park palings in Cornwall."

"None of your jokes upon me, Master Digby," interposed the Cornishman; "you are all abroad about Ingram now; and I'll bet any gentleman a zwanziger that I name what's uppermost in his mind this morning."

"Done," said Ingram himself; "betting's not much in my way; but I think I'm safe this time."

"Who spied a little boat from behind an olive-tree? Ah, my good fellow, I give no trust; toss me your zwanziger," said Trelawney, with a knowing laugh; and Ingram, slightly blushing, complied with the request.

"A fair hit," said Windlesham, as Digby laughed aloud; "so, Master Ingram, you read Catullus to some purpose. Well, what did you think of her?".

"Her," answered the scholar, "who spoke of her?"

"But I spied the boatie, too, lying close up in the reeds," laughed Windlesham; "and I had a near view of the ladye fair long before she stepped so daintily on board, and went dancing away over the glassy swell to Desenzano. Come, Ingram, confess you thought her charming, and in compassion I'll tell you the name of your charmer."

"How came you to know her name?" asked Trelawney; "that is a piece of information of which I thought myself exclusively possessed."

"I come to know, indeed! I got it from the landlord, thanks, as Digby would say, to my knowledge of the language. But how came you to know, for the landlord can't speak Cornish?"

"What is her name, then?"

"Donna Clara."

"Donna fiddlestick! her name's Clara Jerningham, and she's an English girl. I saw a boatman come along with her little portmanteau, and being curious to know her name, all for Ingram's sake, of course, I tripped him up by accident when he passed me, then politely helped to put the box upon his shoulder again: the name was on a little brass-plate. There, Ingram! what an opening for a Greek sonnet: only Jerningham's a hard name to put into Greek."

"A Greek sonnet, indeed," said Ingram; "I know

who is likely to be plucked for 'great-go,' if that's the extent of his knowledge of Greek poetry."

"Hang 'great-go'!" quoth Trelawney, "don't embitter the 'long' with such awful reminiscences; but let Win call for the bill, if you've done breakfast, and let's have up the vetturino to the door."

The young nobleman, the linguist of the party, disappeared hereupon to settle with mine host and order the carriage. When he re-entered the room he exclaimed,

"Good news for Ingram! We shall see her again at Venice; as far as distant admiration goes, romantic devotion, and so forth, you shall have your heart's content, old fellow; but if matters go further, I shall deem it my imperious, though painful duty to step in and cut you out, for she won't suit your book in the long run."

"Why not?" said Ingram, rather nettled at the conceitedness of this last sortie.

"Why, man, she is a singer, the new prima donna at the Fenice in Venice, so they tell me; and I opine that will hardly jump with your views for the future, a parsonage and pupils."

It was well for all parties that Mark was no longer in the room when this was said. He had not relished the turn which the conversation had taken from the first, feeling inexpressibly annoyed at the mere mention of Clara by the young tourists. Windlesham's last sally, which had nettled Ingram, would inevitably have passed his patience. As it was, he had shouldered his knapsack, and was walking along the straight, dusty, poplar-lined road, much revolving in his mind the talk

of the Oxonians, angry with himself for feeling vexed upon no just grounds. Soon the jingling of their horses' bells struck upon his ear, but not before he had himself been espied by the keen eye of Digby. He, having cordially embraced the hypothesis of his being a Cambridge-man was loth to abandon all prospect of his services, in the event of some possible rowing-match, and therefore moved that he should be requested, when overtaken, to occupy the spare seat beside the driver. There was no resisting the frank good humour of Digby's hail; so, after a moment's hesitation, Mark found himself ensconced behind the old sun-dried leather apron of the "vettura," with his knapsack, in guise of footstool, under his feet. The driver jerked the reins and cracked the whip, the horses' bells set again to jingle, and amidst clouds of dust, under a torrid sky, they rolled on towards Verona. Those who remember the old jog-trot of such conveyances, now probably extinct in Lombardy, know right well that it was a promoter of sultry drowsiness rather than of brisk conversation. For miles together there was scarcely one word spoken, except such as passed between Mark and the vetturino, who, finding that the young man beside him spoke Italian more intelligibly than most of his countrymen on their travels, proceeded to catechise him upon the nature, mischiefs, and dangers of the railway, with which his native plains were threatened. He could not have found a better informant, perhaps, than Mark, in all Italy, and therefore, much as the old fellow abhorred the heretical doctrines he evidently held in favour of that vile method of locomotion, he and his companion found plenty to talk about.

Inside the vehicle, Trelawney beguiled the time by counting the poplar-trees till he fell asleep; a moment anxiously watched for by Digby, who sat opposite, and considerately tickled his nose with a straw as soon as the desired event took place. Hereupon the Cornishman starting up, struck his friend, in pure jollity, a blow that might have broken the ribs of an ordinary mortal, and their difference being thus amicably adjusted, both worthies coiled themselves into their respective corners to snore. Windlesham, who had lighted his cigar as was his wont, was trying hard to discover whether Ingram's eyes were also closed, and with that intent peered at him through the smoke at intervals; but the shade of the scholar's cap was so closely drawn over his brow that, after all, he could not clearly ascertain his point. If Ingram's eyes were closed, they were not closed in sleep; though for novelty and strangeness the thoughts that were flitting across his brain might well seem to him the mockeries of a dream. Close his eyes as he would, they were obstinate in following still across the heaving waters of Garda, the little boat in which Clara Jerningham had left the Albergo yesterday. Stop his ears as he would, there was no stopping the words which had so piqued him from ringing in them still. It was very true his prospects were a "parsonage and pupils," and how to reconcile such notions with the image of a prima donna at the Fenice was utterly beyond reach of his faculties. But the most provoking part of it was that he could not persuade himself that no real or imaginary need existed for reconciling such notions to one another at all. A stately figure, yet graceful, dark eyelashes, and deep blue eyes, braided hair, silky and brown—

these were new things for him to think about. After all, perhaps, it was the sweet nobility of that thoughtful brow which haunted his thoughts more than any other thing about her. Oh, if Windlesham, from behind the smoke of his cigar, could but guess the sad disorder of that calm studious brain opposite, poor Ingram might as well break up the long vacation party, and return forthwith to college. Perhaps he will do so as it is; he has thought of doing so—of leaving his companions at Verona, and turning his steps homeward. If he went on to Venice he might see her again, as Windlesham truly said; might see her even without going to the Fenice, which was not a likely place for him to go to. But what if he should see her there? Could there be danger or harm in that? Besides which, Windlesham well knew that he had never been in Venice before, and longed to see that city more than any, save Rome, in Italy. If he ran away at Verona, that keen tormentor would have his suspicions; ten to one but he would guess how matters stood; and all college would hear of it next term. Well, at all events there was no use in deciding just then; he would think about it; and so he did, long after Digby and Trelawney had waked up again and were betting noisily on the numbers of mouse-coloured oxen that should pass the carriage doors right or left.

It was late in the day when they reached the gates of Verona. The vine-dressers of the neighbouring villages were already gliding out upon the road from the thick bowers of trellised foliage on either side, and returning home in groups with laughter and singing. When they had passed the fortified entrances of the city, and were

come to the open space before the Church of San Zeno, Mark, whose name and condition yet remained a mystery to the Oxonians, requested the driver to stop, not a little to the astonishment of Windlesham, who knew the town well, and was aware that they were yet at some distance from the quarter frequented by English travellers. He then threw his knapsack across his shoulders, and stepped up to the carriage door to thank the party inside for the lift they had kindly given him. Windlesham gave a distant nod in return for his salutation, the other two a more hearty one; but Digby, who loved to judge of a man by the grip of his hand, held out his own broad palm, and receiving in it that of Mark, shook it with good will, and had reason to be satisfied with the grip in return of his unknown acquaintance.

"What takes him down that way?" quoth Trelawney.

"A visit to Juliet's tomb by sunset," suggested Ingram.

"Hear, hear," said Windlesham; "what a Romeo our good Ingram must be to pitch upon such a suggestion. We shall catch him out in some balcony scene at Venice yet, I'll warrant—but that broad-shouldered, grimy-fisted chap wouldn't make much of a sentimentalist, even at the tomb of Juliet."

"Quiet lodgings and algebra, that's his sort, if he's a Cantab," said Digby, dogmatically.

"Very likely, shouldn't wonder," was the reply in chorus.

Arrived in Venice, some few days later, Windlesham, well acquainted with the outward aspect of the city, its monuments and galleries, left his companions to lionize

themselves whilst he repaired to his banker, Signor Vantini, an old acquaintance, to take from his conversation such soundings of its present social state as might render his stay pleasant or bearable. English people he found were few—an unexpected relief—Italians more plentiful, amongst them some personal acquaintances, and some "illustrations," as the French say: of these the greatest, perhaps, Zuchetti the Maestro, and he, by the way, in Venice for the sake of an Englishwoman—worthy, however, quoth Vantini, to be a daughter of Italy—a rare artist with a magnificent organ, rehearsing the prima donna's part for Zuchetti's new opera, to be given three days hence at the Fenice—her name almost as harsh as a Tedesca's—native orthography unknown—softened by the Venetians into la Jernietta—character said to be peculiar in some respects, as became an Englishwoman—yet not capricious, and far above plaguing either author or manager. Indeed, the Maestro and she seemed to be bound to one another by no common bond of friendship. That very evening he was to introduce her to Madame Vantini—a few friends would meet in their drawing-room: his lordship's presence would be esteemed an honour; but, by the way, would his lordship take cash for his circular note in napoleons or florins—napoleons must lose a few zwanzigers on exchange just now. Was that exact? Well then, nine o'clock, yes! al piacere, good morning. And his lordship regained his gondola, not a little satisfied at having thus stolen a march upon his friends, to whom he said nothing of his visit to Vantini, or, at least, of his invitation for that evening.

Ingram would, at all events, have envied him his

good fortune: nothing could have been more delightful than the Vantini party: the guests were but few; the Maestro was obliged to leave soon after introducing Clara. Madame Vantini, who was a well-bred Englishwoman, had too much good taste to press her to sing; there was therefore nothing more natural than that she, who had been so long absent from dear old England, should find pleasure in a long and animated conversation with her young, handsome, and entertaining countryman. He knew dear Sir Jeffrey, too, slightly, and had spent a day fishing once at Wymerton; could appreciate the beauty of the Mere, and heartily admired Dame Alice's oak-panelled sitting-room. And besides the charm of his fresh reminiscences of England, and of her English home, a freshness which brought to Clara, in conversing with him, some such sensation as the scent of new-plucked hawthorn boughs will bring to one confined to a sick room in springtime—the young nobleman was well at home in Italy, no stranger, evidently, to the influences of its richly-tinted earth and sky, nor to its treasures of often reviving art, nor to the artist breath that glows throughout its present as well as its former existence. He knew these things, and had felt them; and though there be manifold kinds no less than manifold degrees of knowledge and feeling, there was enough of both in him to claim kindred with the cast of Clara's mind, and to open between her and him a possible intimacy.

The evening, however, was not spent in perfect *tête-à-tête;* Madame Vantini and her daughter, Beatrice, to say nothing of her other guests, had to spell through the alphabet of acquaintance with the gifted Inglesa,

whilst Vantini himself, and certain mustachioed financiers of the party, had many queries and surmises to force upon the reluctant attention of Windlesham, with regard to the railroad in construction from Padua to their own sea-girt city. Despite the youthful and dandified appearance of the Englishman, he was in their eyes an unit of that vast aggregate of speculating capitalists, the people of Great Britain, wherefore they were emboldened to ply and overwhelm him with incoherent questions touching stock, preference shares, amalgamations, and the like, which it might have puzzled a Capel-court broker to answer to their satisfaction.

By-and-by the Maestro reappeared to lead Clara and Cousin Martha down the watersteps, where their boat was waiting. Zuchetti and the Viscount, cigar in mouth, threaded their way on foot across the narrow bridges and through tortuous streets to the Piazza.

"The germ of a great artist there," said the Maestro upon a sudden. "The germ! I crave her pardon—there is already there a remarkable development."

"I can imagine it," answered his companion, "though, of course, I have only seen to-night a simple and unaffected person, with an evident stamp of superiority."

"Ah! you know nothing as yet, how can you? So much calm and so much enthusiasm in combination are a marvel; such self-possession and such power of leaping beyond the boundary of mere individualism! Could you see the colour of her eyes by candle-light?"

"Yes; blue, deep, and fringed by very dark lashes."

"You may well say deep—their's is no mere surface colouring; and out of those depths will come up at times

a stream of light—no mere flash, mind you—but a stream of living energy, such as was unknown to me till I knew this young lady. Did she sing to-night at Vantini's?"

"Not a note; but in the tone of her voice I fancy I could detect something which seemed to announce a singer."

"Well, it is no use to speak of that, since in three days' time you will hear; but let me, as a composer, beg of you to attend to the conscientiousness of her execution when you do. I am of opinion that you may tell a true soul from a false one, even by the manner in which a page of music is read off."

"Maestro, forgive me; but does your Venetian public judge of her as you do, or by the same standard? The absence of all meretricious effort is an excellence which the play-going public in general can ill appreciate."

"Our Venetian public know no more of her than yourself. They expect, upon the faith of my judgment, to hail the advent of a great artist; but this will be her first appearance upon their stage, as it is the first representation of my new work. It was written for her expressly—she and I alike are on our trial—we shall succeed or fall together—and now *felice notte!*"

The Viscount and the Maestro had been pacing to and fro as they discoursed under the deep shadow which the strong moonlight was casting before the porticoes of St. Mark's. As the former emerged from it to pass along the quai to Danieli's hotel, he fancied that he recognised the figure of the young Englishman with whom he and his companions had met at Sermione: his

dress was the same, a fustian jacket and trousers, with an oil-skin cap, but it seemed to be dingier than before.

"What can the fellow be?" mused his lordship; "Trelawney's guess is absurd—he is no Cambridge man. What can have brought him, too, to Venice?" questions which he had not been able to solve to his satisfaction before he was in bed and asleep that night.

Towards the evening of the next day the Maestro, finding Clara still studying intensely certain difficult passages in her part, an occupation in which he had left her absorbed in the earlier hours of the forenoon, insisted upon her closing the piano, shutting up her music books, and accompanying him, with Cousin Martha, to the Lido. Nothing short of the steady fresh breeze from the Adriatic, he insisted, would brace her nerves and cool her feverish head; her eyes must be wearied, too, of poring over those crooked little imps of harmony hanging with misshapen heads between the five bars of the music-ruled pages; she must bathe them for restoration in the mellowed purple and gold of sunset. Madame Vantini and her daughter would most likely join them—perhaps that amiable milordo, her compatriot—so he hurried her into the gondola, which was soon rapidly skimming over the lagoon.

Another boat, some hour or two before, propelled by the vigorous arms of Digby and Trelawney, had carried to the same pleasant spot Windlesham and his studious friend; and after bathing in the rolling surf, the four Oxonians had made their way to the more frequented portion of the promenade. Here, as they sauntered to and fro, they chanced upon the Maestro with Clara and the Vantinis; and no little surprise was excited in the

minds of Windlesham's companions when they saw him join the party, and exchange salutations with the young English lady who had challenged their admiration and roused their curiosity at the Albergo del Gran San Giulio.

They had but little time, however, to spend in conjectures upon his good fortune before he called upon them to share it; having spoken a few words to Madame Vantini and the Maestro, apparently to obtain their sanction, he beckoned to his companions, and introduced them in form.

"Miss Jerningham—Mr. Ingram;" and Windlesham felt, as he had in part anticipated, that the words had sent a thrill through every fibre of the student's being. He understood that if ever a man could be thus love-stricken upon a sudden, the strange fate had befallen Ingram. He had seen his full and intelligent gaze absorb into itself the figure of Clara, before he lowered it and bowed respectfully, and stepped aside. In that one look lay the germ of a life's inward history.

Clara did not seem in any way to notice it. But the manliness, blended with a quaint childish simplicity, visible upon the countenance of the athletic Digby, caught her fancy forthwith; and when, instead of bowing formally, he held out to her his huge hand, she laid hers in it with a frank smiling confidence that delighted him beyond measure, and almost provoked the jealousy of his friends. Side by side, the whole party continued their walk; Digby with Clara and Cousin Martha; Trelawney with the Signora Beatrice, who could speak English very fairly, and upon whom he consequently endeavoured to impress

a notion of the resources of his native Cornwall, and of the stern beauties of the Lizard-point. Windlesham with Madame herself. Ingram fell to the Maestro, whose heart being full of the beauty, the genius, the character of Clara Jerningham, poured out of its fulness into that hapless student's ears. Little did the good Maestro suspect what manner of listener he had thus lighted upon; but if he had, it may be doubted whether the flow of his eloquence upon such a theme would have been checked. Why should not Ingram, why should not every one admire and love his incomparable Jernietta?

Returning in her own gondola was out of the question for Clara; Digby woul l not hear of it. After all, they would all spirt home together, so she might as well give him and his friend the pleasure of rowing her back. "And I'm told, Miss Jerningham, that you sing like a skylark; so you shall set us time with some sweet clear English song; and then we shall see whether Master Ingram there will still regret the Tasso of his silent gondolier. All these Venetian chaps sing through their noses."

So Digby and Trelawney led the way homewards; and Clara did sing for them, sweet clear English songs, such as she used to sing at Wymerton in those old days when yet she was scarcely conscious of her wondrous gift of harmony—joyous, gushing strains at first, such as she loved in girlhood—and then by degrees, almost forgetfully, the liquid notes caught a gentle sadness from the recollections which stole across her; so that instead of "spirting," as he called it, the stalwart rower would scarcely dip the oar into the still water of the lagoon,

lest the plashing of it should disturb her touching melodies.

The Maestro, whose gondola was thus enabled to steal up by the altered rate of Digby's stroke, was in raptures; as for Ingram, perhaps it had been better for him if, at a safe distance, the gondolier had treated him to a nasal stave of the old poet of the Canals.

What ailed him, then? Why was this new sensation, which was filtering into the recesses of his inner heart, suddenly and rapidly, as venom from a poisoned bolt is speedily absorbed throughout the veins and into the very marrow of him who is stricken—why was it felt by him, not as a mere pain, but as a pang of remorse? Was he guilty in anywise? Had he, then, permitted any determination, thought, or desire to form itself definitely within him concerning this Clara, this unknown but gifted and beautiful young woman, whose feet were set in so widely divergent a path of life? Or was the vague possibility of loving her reprehensible? He did not yet foresee how his life should become a high and holy embodiment of principle; and therefore he did not understand what manner of shock and jar passed through his soul at the inburst of a passion.

A passion? Did he so much as guess the advent of any thing so formidable?

There was a youth once, in the days of chivalry, kept his darkling watch by the knightly suit of armour that he should don upon the morrow. His spirit and his race were to answer for his worthiness, for he never yet had mingled in deadly fray. Suddenly, through a loop-hole, a bolt from some hostile cross-bow caused his untried harness to ring against the

panelled wall. He started at the sound; he scarce could guess the cause of it. Yet no long time elapsed, and the glancing of a crossbolt, or the rattle of a shaft against his trusty breastplate, in grim and earnest encounter, could startle him no more.

CHAPTER V.

ARTIST-TRIUMPH—A PIC-NIC—WELDING OF FRIENDSHIP.

"PRODIGIOUS! colossal! fabulous!" exclaimed the Maestro, as he bounced into the sitting-room of the young Englishmen at Danieli's. "But why should I say this to you; you who were present one and all at this more than ovation? Ah! she is your countrywoman; she has triumphed thus in your very presence last night; and here this day is half gone by, this morrow of a victory, and not one of you have been to cast a wreath of admiration at her feet. Per Bacco! But the flame which consumes her must have burnt wondrously within her Italian mother's veins, unquenchable even by the flood of coldness which stagnated in the English breast of a father who was perhaps some such a man as you."

"Mercy! we cry you mercy!" answered the Viscount; "but you judge us hastily, unjustly. Digby here, and Trelawney, were for rushing to empty a wheelbarrow full of bouquets at the Jernietta's door this morning, had I not stopped them for the sake of Cousin Martha, who would require more time than your triumphant Clara to recover last night's excitement. For

such a spirit as the prima donna's the very excitement was refreshment enough, I'll warrant you; but her poor dear cousin would need a sound sleep to set her up again."

"Ebbene! but 'tis now three o'clock—yes, three struck," said the Maestro; "you have not cleared yourself from my reproaches even so."

"Well, then, if I must needs continue to exculpate us, you must know farther, that Mr. Ingram here is guilty of detaining us; we were yet in full controversy with him when you came in."

"At all events," said that personage as he rose from his chair, "I decline to continue it any longer; your side has gained in the Maestro too powerful an accession. I feared an intrusion upon Miss Jerningham; but under his auspices, I think you may safely venture. So good day for the present. We shall meet, I suppose, at dinner."

"Meet!" exclaimed Zuchetti; "people meet after parting. Surely you will accompany us—you, whose appreciation of Miss Clara's talent is, I am sure, none the less correct or lively for being less demonstrative than my Italian warmth seems to exact."

"Excuse me," replied the other; "whatever may be that appreciation, Miss Jerningham will not miss an expression of it, which I think I had better withhold."

"Oh, nonsense, my good fellow," interrupted Windlesham, in a loud voice; "you are too shy even for an Englishman, and an Oxford first-class man. I'll answer for him, Maestro; do you lead the way with the other two, and we will follow." Then, as they left the room, he drew the arm of his companion under his own, and

whispered in his ear, "Learn to look this matter in the face, Ingram; at all events do not betray yourself to that musical chatter-box, who, for all his chattering, is a shrewd fellow, and peered at you through his spectacles, as if he would begin to guess what you scarcely suspect concerning yourself, but what I have discovered already for a certainty." And he hurried him downstairs to rejoin the trio who had preceded them, before he could debate these unexpected words in his own mind and offer resistance or an answer.

At Clara's a new surprise awaited them. Madame Vantini and her daughter were there, which, indeed, was not strange; but seated near an open window, in conversation with Cousin Martha, was the conjectural Cambridge man, who stood up to acknowledge their recognition, and to shake hands with the cordial Digby. This time, however, he was not arrayed in fustian. A jacket of finest blue cloth, white canvas trousers, and a black silk handkerchief twisted round his neck, might have announced a sailor, had their cut been nautical, as Windlesham perceived it was not. His lordship was mystified; but Clara had noticed the greeting between the stranger and Mr. Digby, and did not conceive that there was need of any further introduction.

The congratulations now offered she received with perfect ease and simplicity, but seemed anxious to turn them off from herself to the Maestro. "The triumph last night was fair enough; but to prolong my share of it beyond the moment is unjustifiable."

"Did Miss Jerningham, then, value the noisy plaudits

of the theatre, however justly bestowed, beyond the calmer judgments of friends and admirers expressed thus quietly in private?" Ingram ventured to inquire.

"Their noisy plaudits, by no means! Upon these," said Clara, "I set little price; whereas, the approval of friends is inestimable, when bestowed on what may fairly challenge it. But if, by fair triumph, you understood me to mean applause fairly won, my true meaning has escaped you."

Ingram, somewhat discomfited, found no heart for further questioning; but Windlesham demanded forthwith to know in what the artist's triumph consisted if not in the applause of the discerning public.

"Grant the discernment of the public," she continued, "and its applause might justly rise in our esteem. I don't wish to rebel too insolently against that great arbiter; but the Maestro will agree with me, that the bulk of the public within the walls of a theatre follow a lead too easily for us to put much faith in their discernment, unless when carried away by one of those impulsive recognitions of truth and beauty which burst upon crowds suddenly, almost irresistibly."

"All that about the discerning public is true enough," said the Maestro, thus appealed to; "but your last night's triumph, in what did it consist, and why may it not, or can it not, be prolonged into this day, this next week; these years to come if need be?"

"No, my dear friend, there is no prolonging it, because the thing itself is essentially fugitive. My triumph, the triumph of every true artist-heart, lies in the swaying of other men's emotions. It was not, Mr. Ingram, when

the spectators applauded, but when they were silent, that I felt exultation. When my artist power had fairly stilled the throb of their personality, and drowned it for the moment in mine; when the pulse of that whole assembly seemed to beat in myself alone; when every glance, every motion of mine directed and controlled their breathless attention—then I felt myself queen of the moment. You might as well talk of prolonging an electric shock as such a triumph. But positively, Maestro, I will not hear one word more of myself or my achievements just now. Let us rather speak of yours. What say you, my lord, of the music of this opera?"

"If I answer your question," said Windlesham, "I shall incur the risk of your displeasure, for I must needs speak again concerning you."

"How so?"

"Because of necessity the effect of the music, as we felt it last night, depended in a great measure upon your execution, and upon the colouring which your interpretation of it cast over the composer's conception. You had absorbed into your own person, not only our emotions, but in great measure also the intention of the Maestro's appeal to them; you and he cannot yet be judged apart from one another."

"Neither would I, at least, wish for any such separation," exclaimed Zuchetti. "Ah, Miss Clara, you did not absorb my intention into yourself; you generously transfused yourself into my intention, animating it with a life which I was powerless to give."

"You are too sincere to pay an unmeaning or an unmeant compliment," said she; "but do not speak so

unworthily of your own sublimer gift. His lordship may be right; it may not be easy, just yet, to judge of your work by itself as it deserves; but mark its claim to a higher nobility, its judgment is yet to come, and will endure, as will the matter judged of. Your achievement has a life, durable, perhaps undying; mine had a moment's which now is no longer. Your triumph, if you obtain it, is, indeed, worth speaking of."

"If I obtain it, as you say; but tell us, then, signorina, when may it be considered as obtained, and by whose lawful decree?"

"It is too bad that I should submit," she replied, "to such an interrogatory. Yet who should speak of such things if not we? The time of your triumph, Maestro, is hard to fix, for it is ever renewing; it is renewed whenever they who possess intelligence to judge of your work as a whole shall stamp it with the seal of their approbation; and thus I have mentioned one class of your judges. But there is another legitimate triumph for the musician, when any one phrase of his poem, any one melody, shall receive the stamp of true popular approbation."

"What!" interrupted the Viscount, "when the Maestro shall mount the proud car of the barrel-organ and hurdy-gurdy, whilst bawling street-singers and whistling tramps resound his victorious Io triumphe!"

"Not exactly; there is a transient popular approbation which vulgarizes; there is an enduring one which consecrates a melody. When your musical expression of some true thought or feeling shall pass into the hearts of the people; when some sailor thinking of home, shall, through the nightwatch, hum the bars of your

love ditty; when some mother, rocking her sick child by the cottage fireside, shall soothe it with a strain of yours; or when some blacksmith and his fellows shall time their hammer-strokes to the cadence of your chorus, Maestro—then, I say, you shall have won another laurel crown, of which the most sublime composer might be proud."

"Nobly said, Miss Clara," cried Mark Brandling, as he rose. "Thank you a thousand times for that: your head is clear, and your heart sound after all."

"And thank you for your good opinion," answered she, "in spite of that doubtful 'after all,' for which I shall take you to task some day."

"Well, I shall deal honestly by you when you do," he said, as he shook hands and left the room, soon followed by the others, who felt that the conversation was at an end.

"Do you regret your altered determination?" inquired Zuchetti of Ingram, as they descended the stairs. "Does she not deserve your visit and your tribute of admiration?"

He answered nothing. Did he regret it? In truth he did.

"Monstrous impertinent of the Cambridge man," said Trelawney. "What did the fellow mean by 'after all?' eh, Windlesham?"

"I'll tell you what, my good friend, he is no Cambridge man, nor university man at all."

"Then what on earth do you suppose he is?"

"I canot say for certain, but I can guess what he would call himself if we should ask him."

"Indeed! What would he call himself?"

"A man of the people."

Mark's mystery, which by the way was none of his own making, soon received its solution. Ingram was an early riser, from old industrious Oxford habits: and that desire for solitude which will seize upon men at the birth or during the sensible growth of a strong affection, now drove him to long and lonely walks in the morning. One day, soon after sunrise, he found himself in a part of the town little frequented at any hour by fashionable tourists, situated at the lower end of the Giudecca canal.

Early as it was, the sons of toil, and its daughters too, were afoot in considerable numbers; some of whom were crowding into a large, clumsy, six-oared gondola which was to carry them across the water to the main land. To these Ingram joined himself, in listless and abstracted mood, and without stopping to inquire which point might be their destination, took his seat. Once fairly off, some five or six of his fellow-passengers began to chant an effective chorus from Zuchetti's successful opera. This roused him from his reverie by recalling to mind the speech of Clara concerning a musician's popular crown. When he looked up towards the singers, by a singular coincidence, his eye lighted upon the young Englishman who had thanked her for it with so much heartiness. There he sat in original fustian, strong, frank, highly intelligent in appearance, and, beyond doubt, a working man.

He returned, without embarrassment or false shame, the student's greeting, and, in answer to his inquiring looks, informed him at once that he was betaking himself to his daily work upon the other side, where stood

the shed under which Messrs. Bright and Brassy, the English contractors, were fitting up locomotives to serve the new Lombardo-Venetian line. He was the only English "hand," as he expressed it, employed upon the work, although the superintendent was a Manchester man, a sound practical engineer, with a good knowledge of mechanics. A few Frenchmen and Germans worked with him, and several Italians. He, Mark Brandling, was foreman.

The conversation which ensued was desultory; but, even so, the Oxonian could not fail to be struck by the shrewdness and sound sense of his companion, and still more by the evident cultivation of his mind—a cultivation different in tone from that of his own, but, to judge of it upon the moment, not so very far inferior in degree.

As they landed, the bell from the workshed was ringing lustily, and Mark was compelled to hurry forward. Ingram having nothing better to do than to return to breakfast, a meal of which the absence is disquieting even to lovers in tolerable health, went back forthwith in the boat which had brought him across.

The announcement of his discovery was variously received by his friends at Danieli's. Trelawney doubted of such manner of acquaintances: if in a Cambridge man he might suspect a radical, might he not infer with certainty a red republican in a mechanic from Sheffield or from Manchester? Trelawney's people were county-family to the back-bone. Digby, on the other hand, who was hailfellow with every waterman of renown, from Hungerford bridge to Henley, and who, although a thorough gentleman in feeling, cherished profound respect

for the strong-backed and sturdy-limbed confraternity of coalwhippers, had no scruples about the matter. There was a manliness upon Mark's forehead, and a determination in his eye, agreeing with his own—the muscular outline, moreover, of his forearm was unexceptionable—and that fingergrip at the entrance of Verona noteworthy—Digby was all for following up the acquaintance, and resolved, at any rate, to pursue it upon his own account. The Viscount at first said nothing, but lighted a fresh cigar, towards the end of which he had made up his mind, and entirely acquiesced in the views of the last honourable speaker, assuring Trelawney, to his utter consternation, that in case young Brandling should prove a communist, he, Viscount Windlesham, would esteem his acquaintance all the more valuable, interesting, and instructive.

It being thus ruled by an imposing majority that Mark's intimacy was to be cultivated, the next point for consideration was to devise the safest and pleasantest mode of so doing.

"We must feed him," suggested Digby.

"Exactly so," replied the Viscount; "being men and Englishmen, it is necessary that we should eat and drink together in order to become friends. In proof of which, did time allow, many arguments, historical and philosophical, might be adduced."

"Not omitting such classical additions as I should be forthwith ready to supply," said Ingram.

"But, the question is," resumed Windlesham, "under what auspices to initiate a conciliatory banquet. There is something formal in a regular invitation to dinner, a savour of unseemly ostentation in offering him at

starting what we should call 'a regular spread' in Alma Mater."

"Ah," said Digby, "I see—spacious apartment—handsome show of plate—cut glass finger-bowls—six waiters in attendance—in short, the combined resources of Danieli's lavished upon 'an entertainment in his well-known style,' as the county papers have it, might be considered overwhelming—right enough, old boy! Stop a bit though—I have it. Combine a little business, too, with our pleasuring—a touch of wholesome training—we'll have a boating party up the Brenta, with a pic-nic on the bank—a sort of Venetian Nuncham party to be sure."

"Capital notion; the very thing!" cried his friends in concert.

"But how shall we get at him?" said the proposer; "shall I pull over to the workshop?"

"Certainly not," answered Windlesham; "he may have the good sense not to be ashamed of receiving you there; but, as you are a gentleman and he a mechanic, you are bound to proceed with scrupulous delicacy: ask him when you can meet more upon a level, when the fustian has been thrown aside for the blue cloth jacket."

"Right again; but where shall we find him? Ingram never asked him where he lived."

"You will find him," said the Viscount, with a keen look at the last-named individual; "you will find him, this evening, where, in all probability, our friend here will be found also, upon the farther side of the Lido, beyond the old Jewish burying-ground."

"What? where we have seen Miss Jerningham most evenings that we have pulled over?"

"Precisely so, my good fellow," said the Viscount.

The invitation was frankly accepted as given. The boating party took place; not in a gondola, to Digby's satisfaction, but in a regular four-oared gig, which Windlesham, who knew everybody, borrowed from the noble captain of an Austrian corvette in the harbour. The smiling banks of the Brenta presented an unusual picture of animation, as the day was a festa, which accounted for Mark's absence from the workshed.

"We have too few such days," he said, "in England, in spite of our national proverb, 'All work and no play.'"

"But when we have," answered one of the party, "the people seem at a loss to know what to do with them. The better sort of working men seem to waste them lounging with their hands in their pockets, whilst others do worse, and pass them in swilling."

"Too true," said Mark, "yet, many working men employ these rare days not only innocently, but rationally and profitably—the plant-seekers and insect-hunters of Lancashire to wit; even those of whom you spoke might have something said for them perhaps."

"As how, may I inquire?"

"Why, the loungers may be said to be so little used to a holiday that they do not know how to profit by one; this fault or its mending can scarcely be said to lie with them."

"Very true; but the tap-room rioters?"

"Ah, gentlemen, you must not take offence if I shall plead for them, that they have scarcely yet had time to unlearn a lesson your class taught them in bygone days. I mean the notion, that pleasure and intemperance are two names for one thing."

"Something, perhaps, in that; but you will allow that manners have mended amongst us in that respect amazingly."

"Gladly, and we share in your amendment; at least, as I believe. Then, these railways will do much for us on that score."

"Excursion trains, eh?" said Trelawney. "My father hates them; says nothing will tend more to demoralize the people and alter our old national habits."

"Perhaps, sir, your father looks upon the gloomy side of them—all things have their gloomy side—and I won't deny there are some ill-looking things about these trains, the Sunday ones especially."

"Well, but the good of them?" asked Ingram, much interested in thus hearing, for the first time, upon such a subject, a genuine working man's opinion.

"What! the good of getting out of coal-smoke, out of cotton-fluff, or steel-filings, into God's pure air; that's not far to look for, is it, sir? To get a dragon harnessed to carriages, as in old story-books, who'll drag you out of dark, dull streets into green grass and golden corn; can't you see the good of that? Can't you see the good, sir, of lads and lasses running down to far off villages to spend an hour or two with mother, who's a widow maybe, or father, whom they haven't seen this three years! Ay, and without that, sir, to go pleasuring on a visit to some fine work of men's hands, or some work of their Maker's hands, grander by a deal; mayn't there be good in that which you or I might find it hard to measure? Ask your own heart, sir, for an answer; it will give you one. But I will give an instance, if you'll allow me, taken from the life. There was an old

cobbler, gentlemen, whom I once knew, a man whose cobbling-work was like himself, honest and true. He lived in a close dirty court in the manufacturing town where I was born. A great reader of the Bible was this old cobbler; few men I have come across contrived to put as much of that book into their lives as he. It was an inland town we lived in; and what between church-going—for he was a great church-goer—Bible-reading, his lasts and his stall, old as he was, he had never wandered five miles from home. It happened that an excursion train was got up to take to the seaside, for a day's pleasure, the children of a Sunday-school, in which he was a teacher. He would not leave his little ones; so he found himself upon a bright, blowing day, perched on a bold headland, in sight of the open sea. He sat there, hour after hour, fairly mazed in wonderment, watching the ships which a strong breeze was driving through the waves. It was like a bit of a revelation—so many words and figures which he had found in his well-thumbed Bible were now become real and life-like; he could have cried for thankfulness and joy; I dare say he did. Had you heard him come out with the Psalm: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters, these men see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep. For at his word the stormy wind ariseth, which lifteth up the waves thereof,' and so on, for many verses;—had you seen the light in his old eye as he repeated them, it must have touched you, sir, and might have taught you something."

"Jolly old brick of a cobbler!" interrupted Digby, hearty, if not reverent, in his admiration.

"Ah!" continued Mark, "I wish William Wordsworth had heard and seen him there."

"Why so?" said Ingram; "do you think the poet of Peter Bell would have enshrined the cobbler-saint in verse?"

"He might have done worse than that too! I reckon it won't tell any way against him in the long run, that he put us and ours into his verses either. But I was thinking of something else; of a letter he sent once to the papers against a branch line of a rail coming down his way, by the Lakes there."

"I remember it," said Ingram, "and its loud lamentations against the rude invasion of his favourite haunts by noisy crowds. I thought it drivelling at the time. He seemed to fear lest the quiet beauties of his dear lake scenery should be spoilt by a rush of vulgar explorers, as if an army of cockneys on Skiddaw could dwarf the mountain, or a fleet of them on Windermere dull the gleaming of its waters."

"True for you, sir; but that's not yet what I'm at."

"At what then?"

"Why you're sticking to what the men may make of the place; and I'm all the while running after what the place may make of the men. Look you here, sir: a man's bigger than a mountain for all he may be a poor little starveling cockney. Mr. Wordsworth should have thought of that now. If Nature's a book, and a poet's a master to teach reading it, why should a poet fall out with a cheap train, bringing scholars in hundreds to the schoolroom door?"

"I see," quoth Digby; "might as well object to a

cheap edition of his own works 'for the use of the million,' as Radical newspapers say."

By this time they were alongside of a lawn, sloping down to the water's edge, where overhanging willows dip their green boughs in the stream—an English incident in a Lombard landscape. It was the foreground to the garden of Signor Vantini's villa; and here they landed.

In spite of the mosquitoes, the dinner went off merrily, Mark losing nothing in the estimation of his entertainers by the self-possession with which he made acquaintance, probably for the first time in his life, with the flavour of choice Silleri and of genuine Havannahs. In truth, the self-respect, and the respect of his own order with which the young mechanic was penetrated, served to render his intercourse with these young men of superior rank easy and unconstrained. If the whole truth were told, it surprised them not a little. Windlesham was not quite prepared for it; and Trelawney had cold qualms of astonishment, almost of remorse, coming over him from time to time. What would his father say to such a phenomenon as this new acquaintance of theirs? What would his kinsfolk in Cornwall think of him, could they espy him at this subversive picnic? He felt as a shipwrecked sailor might whom cannibals should seduce into partaking with them of the roasted carcase of a drowned shipmate, washed ashore; whose conscience should smite him as he detected himself now and then, not entirely without relish for the entertainment. The Oxford "Cad" —that most unhappy type of the lower-class Englishman—was Trelawney's only concrete "man of the

people," the only tangible individual specimen with whom he was familiarly acquainted, saving always keepers and grooms at home. His abstract ideal was of some creature far more repugnant and dangerous—of something between a French republican of '93 and a modern lighter of "swing" fires. Now with Mark's manners, little fault was to be found in essentials; and for his mind, the young Cornish gentleman had sense to feel that his own county-family plummet would scarce fathom the mechanic's draw-well. Mark, upon his side, had ample reason to be satisfied, some, perhaps, also to be surprised. Windlesham's perfect *savoir-vivre*, the boating-man's rough but genial heartiness, the thoughtful, quiet ease of the student, gave him, without effort, a friendly footing among these "aristocrats," such as he would not have thought it possible to stand on three weeks ago.

That was a rare holiday upon the green-sward under the willows: none of the young men but were sorry when its golden sun went down into the purple clouds beyond the towers and spires of the floating city.

Yet, be the reason what it may, the feeling of frank and generous companionship felt on that one day on the Brenta, like many other happy feelings, was transient. To do the Oxonians justice, they had no inclination to drop their short-lived intimacy with the young mechanic. Mark had worked in Newcastle, and had there acquired no mean proficiency in that aquatic skill which has enabled sons of Tyne to carry off upon the bosom of old Thames himself, and from his favourite champions, the prize of a well-rowed wager. This was passport enough to the permanent favour of

Digby. Windlesham had, for purposes of his own, urged his companions to cultivate Mark's acquaintance; whilst Ingram felt, for a reason scarcely apparent to himself, drawn towards him by a powerful sympathetic tendency. But Mark,—either from that prejudice of caste, which sunders men so grievously in spirit even where the empire of caste is nominally unknown, evil prejudice which nestles as close under fustian jackets as under coats of the finest cloth and most unexceptionable cut; or else from some more exclusively personal apprehension of antagonism, some secret working of a possible antipathy,—Mark designedly set himself to lessen opportunities for the ripening of this newly-formed acquaintance. It is true his shrinking from the society of the Oxonians was not sufficiently powerful to counterbalance the strong attraction which, evening after evening, brought him to the Lido, where Clara and her cousin invariably took their walk, whenever her duties at the theatre did not interfere with the healthful custom. But it is no less true, that on those many evenings when, by a singularly consistent chain of coincidences, the gondola of the young "aristocrats" found its way to the well-known spot, he would, with whatever reluctance, shorten his own pleasure, and as soon as he could do so without exciting attention, make his way back to the city, and to his own remote lodging upon the lower outskirts of the Grand canal.

Sometimes, indeed, his simple manœuvres would be paralyzed by some counter manœuvre of the wily Viscount, whose keen observation had soon detected them, and whose skilful direction would contrive to frustrate

them by a word or a look of Clara's, sent, unsuspectingly, at his bidding, towards the intending deserter. Sometimes, also, the honest friendliness of Ingram, and the undisguised desire he manifested to hold thoughtful conversation, would effect the same result.

Nay, more; in this one case, Mark's determination happily gave way: such opportunities as his own occupation afforded, and Ingram's manner of life with his fellow collegians allowed, were at last made constantly available by mutual consent. The sons of the hammer and the book, as Orientals would have called them, spent in each other's company many hours, of incalculable worth to either. Self-taught men in Mark's position are apt to forget that for what they have learned, often by so much heroic mental exertion, such strong individual resolve, they are after all indebted to others. Oral teaching has this great moral advantage over the teaching which books give, that the look, the voice, the gesture of the teacher, convey insensibly, along with the instruction, an appeal to our feelings of respect and gratitude. We feel in the presence and at the word of a master of the lore we would acquire, more vividly than we can ever do in presence of an absent, unknown teacher's book, a sense of obligation and of mutual dependence. We more readily apprehend that our acquisitions are a gift received, not a prey snatched or extorted. We are, if it may be said with reverence, more favourably disposed to understand how, in this sense also, there is deep truth and meaning in the words of the Divine Teacher, "Other men have laboured and ye have entered into their labours." It

was good and profitable for Mark, that his self-tutored and, perhaps, therefore, too self-reliant intellect, should come into close contact with one trained and disciplined after so different a fashion. Ingram, who had taken double honours, was able to enter into the nature and direction of Mark's mechanical studies, and found it within his power to suggest to him, from his own larger acquaintance with books, valuable hints for future guidance in his course of self-culture; benefits amply repaid to himself by an insight into the depth of thought and tone of mind existing now-a-days in so many of the men to whose social class Mark belonged.

Conversation between two Englishmen of their age, no matter what their social position, or what the bias of their studious tastes, could not, of course, be confined to matters of serious research or study. The past and present of either individual, adventures and impressions, were freely spoken of when once reserve had thawed. As the wont of young men is, there were occasional communications of hopes, fears, wishes, so that the future was not kept utterly out of sight. But one matter there was, which, by a contradiction easy to be understood, lay uppermost, and yet undermost, in the heart of either, whereof not one direct word made mention. Ingram's attention however had been directed by a remark of Windlesham's to the attraction which Clara seemed to exercise upon the young mechanic; and it is small wonder, that with the keen instinct conferred upon the scholar by the strong passion which had assaulted him, he should have followed up the clue, until by countless indications he had seized

upon the knowledge of that which Mark scarcely knew for the inmost secret of his own heart. Perhaps it may be worthy of consideration, by those who like to discriminate between the nicer shades of human feeling, that Ingram's increasing regard for Mark was not checked in its growth by the certainty to which on this point he attained; whereas, if the whole truth is to be told, the bare suspicion of the existence of any similar affection in Lord Windlesham, vexed, irritated, and tormented him.

Thus, amongst the young men, two hearts and a third head, at least, were full of Clara Jerningham; with whom, however, as the weeks went by, Digby alone appeared to become intimate. That good-humoured waterman was heart-whole, and could, unreservedly, enjoy a frank and cordial intercourse with his gifted countrywoman. The Viscount's social subtlety would not allow him to appear on unreserved terms with her; whilst Trelawney was in a fair way to lose, by other means, on one point at least, the fervency of his preference for things Cornish over all other things imaginable.

It was a pleasant house, that Casa Vantini—Italian in many respects, in some most unlike Italy. One characteristic feature it soon put on for all the party, save only Mark, who never crossed its threshold. It was a sort of home abroad to one and all of them. Few evenings but saw them gathered in its saloons, or on its balconies. Whether it were a blossoming orange upon one of these, and the obvious comparison to be suggested between it and the famous lemon-tree upon the south wall, at Polgarthen, which first

brought Beatrice Vantini and the Cornishman into close converse, I know not; but certainly it was a rare catch for Trelawney to have lighted upon a willing listener to his descant on the beauties and glories of his native county. There was something very flattering in the unexpected deference wherewith his enthusiastic eulogies were heard and suffered to pass uncontradicted. And when a young lady is kind enough to listen with growing interest to every detail of a minute description of his own home given her by a young gentleman, there is a grateful feeling of the fitness of things which must end by giving her an unexpected place and right in his remembrances and thoughts of the home described.

"Ah, signorina! if you could only see the beech-wood walk, just where the break in the coppice shows the shore at Mervynstow, and the sea line beyond!—but what's the use of describing? Oh, dear, I do so wish you could only come to Polgarthen."

"Ed Io lo vorrei bene," half whispers Beatrice, who might as well have spoken English, seeing it was her mother's if not her mother-tongue.

"No, really now! really, Beatrice? I beg pardon, Miss Vantini! do pray say that again."

"Ancora! ma perchè dunque caro signor mio?" And thereupon long explanations in such undertones as do not reach the body of the room, where louder and more confused chatterings cross each other.

"Yes, Miss Jerningham, the Rifles; and a smart rifleman the lad will make, thanks to a judicious and early applied system of drill by threshing, administered by an affectionate, strong-fisted elder brother."

"And you join him at Corfu within three weeks or so? Well, if these calm long evenings last, you'll have a pleasant voyage down the Adriatic."

"Pleasant, I believe you; yet I shall be sorry to begin the break up of our party here. They're a rattling jolly set of fellows. Win, and Ingram, and the Cornishman there, on the balcony—don't you think so?"

"I'm not quite sure, if I *must* answer the question, what you mean by 'rattling jolly.' There's Mr. Ingram, for instance, rattles as little as any man of his age with whom I was ever acquainted; what am I to say of him?"

"Well, perhaps, rattling's not quite the word for him; but he's no muff, for all his book learning, and was jolly enough, poor fellow, till he fell in love with——. Oh! but I beg your pardon or his pardon," stammered Digby, rather taken back by his incautious announcement.

"One little song, Carina, one only we will ask for and insist upon," opportunely broke in the Maestro; and under cover of the interruption Digby retreated, with a vague promise of "a box of woodcocks now and then, Miss Jerningham, from Albania, by the Trieste steamer, if I may take the liberty, later in the season."

"At San Lazari? Oh yes; I spent this very afternoon there in the library, and came across a choice editio princeps of——"

"Ze Relvey-taimes, you say, milor, ver mosh obligato; zat give ze share di preferenza list too? bravissimo! Ma silenzio per la musica, signori!" . . .

"Better have spent the evening as well in the library

of the Armenian brethren, Ingram," whispers the Viscount at the scholar's ear. "There's a tough battle to be fought within—prudence *versus* folly; surely the latter is in training just now, gaining strength by airing itself at those open windows of your eyes."

Ingram smiled, but winced, and was ashamed at the fierce pang of something too like hate, which went through him as the other spoke. He was half inclined to take the warning and go home; but had not the courage, as long as he felt that Windlesham's eye was upon him; so he compromised the matter by falling back out of the front row of the listeners to Clara's music, and settled down upon an ottoman, in company of Cousin Martha. Of all the Oxonians he was her prime favourite, although his place in her good graces was far lower than that which her plebeian heart, true to the instinct of its order, gave to Mark Brandling,

CHAPTER VI.

IRRESOLUTION—A DISAPPOINTMENT.

As they went home that evening in detachments, Trelawney and Windlesham lingering after most of the guests had made their bow,—Digby, whose honest sense of remorse could not otherwise be quieted, disclosed to Ingram the indiscretion of which he had been guilty. Great was the scholar's amazement and confusion; but along with them stole into his secret heart a vague expectation, between hope and fear, that something must needs betray the sentiment with which Clara received the unwarrantable intimation. If she should have heard with displeasure what his friend had so indiscreetly taken leave to announce, then that displeasure would come in aid to his irresolute purpose. His wisdom said, "go;" should her's re-echo the saying, he would go, must go, could not help going: so he reasoned. But, if otherwise?—words at the spelling of which within his fancy, throb of heart and swimming of brain became almost unendurable,—if otherwise, what then? should he remain? He would not resolve the question: he could not: time must bring decision.

What prodigious efforts of courage and of resolution it cost the poor fellow now to bring himself to face Miss Jerningham. Should he join the walking party on the Lido this afternoon or not? Should he accept the Maestro's invitation to spend the morning at the Belle Arti, or should he refuse, since this was one of Clara's leisure mornings, and if she were not likely to visit the accademia, the old Maestro would never go picture-gazing? Should he absent himself from the Thursday evening at Casa Vantini, her presence there on the Thursday being a matter of course?

Ten days of the torment were making deep traces on him. He was of spare frame at the best of times, and now grew visibly thinner: there was a grey colour coming over his countenance. Even Trelawney, who saw things through a haze just now, could not help noticing it. Having taken it into his head that his poor friend's chest was going, he bored him with panegyrics upon the climate of Penzance as a winter residence for pulmonary patients.

But Clara showed no consciousness, having none to show. Digby's escapade had either been unnoticed or misunderstood. In truth his sentence had been broken: could she have called it to mind, had she wished to interpret its meaning, she must have decided, in much probability, that the taciturn Ingram had fallen in love, by no means with herself, but with some choice manuscript or Aldine impression of a classic in his dear library of San Lazari. She was unconscious, every way, of what was passing within him; so was Mark Brandling, who was less blind, however, than she, to what was passing on him. He too adopted

a "books and study" theory of his friend's evident ailment, and would overtax his own superior physical strength, when the long day's work demanded rest for it, by protracted pacings up and down the Lido in company with the Oxonian, whom he conceived to be dwindling for want of air and exercise. Well was it for Ingram that an unexpected event forced on him the crisis of decision.

All Venice, at least all musical Venice, had been astir for some days with expectation of a grand "field night" at the Fenice. Some passing Viceroy on his way to Milan, or some "Royal-Imperial" name-day occurring in the calendar, or some such disturbance of the ordinary theatrical course, had determined an extraordinary representation. The house was to be illuminated "a giorno;" admissions on the free list cut off without compunction. Happy the legitimate and constant possessors of a "palco;" not a box was to be had now for love or money. The hero and the heroine of the fête were still to be "La Jernietta ed il Maestro:" his music and her melody were to have the glories of the night. The Vantinis, of course, were present, in their own vast hereditary box; cousins and kinsfolk filling it to overflowing, for this was one of those occasions when, even without invitation, the whole family claimed a prescriptive right in it. There was not a little astonishment, perhaps even not a little soreness, manifested in subdued whisperings and censorial glances exchanged between certain ladies of that affectionate group, at the unprecedented occurrence of the presence within that box of a gentleman who had no claim of kin with them.

"Quite a stranger, one may say, my dear! and an Englishman to boot. Why could not Signor 'Treloni' have been seated in the pit with the handsome Milordo and that 'pezzo di uomo,' that strapping Signor Diggibi?"

Even Madame Vantini, indulgent as she was apt to be, was rather put out at finding that the Cornishman had slipped so quietly into a seat immediately behind Miss Beatrice. But no coldness seemed to chill, nor any frown to discompose him; so, perhaps, it was best to let things be, and take no further notice of his intrusion.

Clara was in magnificent voice that evening; more completely mistress of herself than on the other critical occasion of her first appearance. The sea of heads before her strung, did not agitate, her nerves. The only thing which moved her was the applause, and that only in the way of irritation. Those trying moments, when no sound is heard but the voice of the singer, scarcely accompanied by a suppressed bar or two of instrumental music, gave her intense pleasure and increased confidence. It seemed to her that her very eyesight gained steadiness and articulate distinctness; it sought out and found one by one all the familiar and loving faces. The genial Digby and the shrewd Viscount in the pit; dear Cousin Martha in one corner of an upper tier, and the fatherly Maestro near her: Madame Vantini right in front; and, I almost believe the heads of Beatrice and the Cornishman inclining to one another in the background. She missed Ingram, and noticed Mark's absence: not knowing, that in this case, his eyes also were upon her.

There had been some hitch in the scene-shifting machinery; the head carpenter, who knew young Brandling, and his mechanical acuteness, had called him in for consultation and handicraft late in the afternoon. He was still in the mysterious shift-region when the curtain drew up; there was no help for it but to assist at the spectacle, in fustian, at the side scenes. He was minded to slip away on one occasion as Clara came off the stage in his direction; not for shame of the fustian so much as for that sweet undefined fear of her which would at times creep over him. Well was it for him that he did not. All Venice would have envied him the radiant smile and sisterly shake of hand she gave him as she went by. "Evviva Clara!" You are a noble and true bookbinder's daughter. You never suspected what the scene-shifters and their mates cheered you so loudly for. There were lovers of music, ay, fanatics for music in their company; but they did not cheer the prima donna, mind you, that time; only the bright blue-eyed English girl, who, coming triumphantly off the glittering stage, shook hands so bravely with the man that rivets boilers.

Yes! all Venice would have envied Mark that hearty recognition, had all Venice also been in the side-scenes. So too, perhaps, would the poor love-sick student, who was neither there nor elsewhere in the illuminated house, but walking up and down in somewhat morbid mood outside, in a narrow street, murky enough by reason of deplorable tin lamps with rancid oil, its sole enlighteners; dampish too, by reason of night vapours, steaming up from the canal choked with cabbage leaves, in the sultry night hours.

I will not pretend to say that he was doing himself much good by that exterior patrolling of the playhouse; but, happily, though he suspected it not, there was good appointed for him to do there. The entrances, the staircases, the galleries, the "house" itself, all faced away from the direction of those little windows which looked out on the narrow street which he was pacing. These windows gave light to corridors, offices, dressing-rooms, and so forth; perhaps, the knowledge that two of them lighted a little room belonging to the Jerningham gives the secret of what drew him there to stray up and down outside. But round the corner of the building, in a lateral street or lane, a strange red flickering glare attracted his attention. It certainly was not caused by the illumination of the theatre, for it was wholly unlike to the strong, steady, clear blaze which streamed out at the windows near the front. Perhaps it was some gleam of fireworks lit up behind the stage for some scenic effect. But no! that thin tongue of flame, which, like a serpent's, just quivered through the darkness from between the half-closed panels of a shutter, surely that is another and more dangerous matter than a stage firework! Yes, dangerous and horrible it is in a degree not measurable. That crowded house of human beings! Ah! selfish heart unselfish! a keener pang: that house which houses his heart's own idol—there is no doubt about the matter, is on fire!

Master, if not of his affections, yet of his thoughts, and of their intensity, as becomes a student, taxer of their concentrated power, in one moment he compelled himself to think and to remember which of the many

little side doors in the street would lead immediately to a staircase which once, or it may be twice, he had mounted with the Maestro, and which would lead him to the office of a certain managing inspector, the most likely man, from his intimate knowledge of every working detail and intricacy of the building, to give the wisest and safest directions for assistance and escape. Quick as thought, and with such strength as a cool frenzy can alone give, he had forced open that side door, darted up the stairs and along the corridor, where a little smoke was just beginning to thicken at the farther end; he had burst into the inspector's room, given him the alarm, and then plunged into the endless intricacies of the dark winding passages in the direction of Clara's room.

She was alone upon the stage, declaiming in a recitative, clear and sonorous, yet tender and full. Upon the continuous articulate vibration of her rich voice, upon the easy, noble, accompaniment of her look and gesture, the audience was hanging eager and enthralled. Just then, at least, the Maestro's assertion was true; the spell was of her own casting, not of the composer's. A consciousness was on her of the influence she was wielding; but she was neither absorbed in that, nor yet wholly in the realizing of the part she played. The remembrance of her first night at the Queen's Theatre at home in England with dear old Sir Jeffrey, had come across her, quick and clear. The recollection of her own surrender of sense and thought to the admirable artist who let light into her own dark artistic aspirations that evening, came strong upon her, came in aid of her effort to fascinate and rivet

the attention of that great crowd. The effort was for minutes together, wholly and indescribably successful, when, suddenly, there was a breaking off. The sympathetic light died out rapidly with simultaneous electrical effect from those thousand eyes fixed on her. A keen flash of some other, and seemingly terrible, emotion darted across them. She marvelled at the phenomenon, was troubled, as with an instinct caught from their altered glance: she was silent: but an appalling cry burst at once upon that silence—"Fire! fire! Escape for your lives."

How describe the tumult—the wild outburst of amazement, fear, cowardice, selfishness, energy, pitifulness, tenderness, bravery, self-devotion, despair?

The spasmodic agitation of that great mass of quivering humanity seemed for moments, or minutes, she could never tell which, to have magnetized Clara and fixed her to the spot. But soon a sweeping wave of men and women, recoiling from the first movement towards the usual exit, and surging up over the barriers between the stage and the body of the house, warned her that the only hope of escape lay behind. As thick volumes of smoke from the sides seemed to forbid it in that direction, she turned and fled up the stage, and out towards the passages at the back, which led to her own apartment, preserving, in the hurry of danger, sufficient presence of mind to bethink herself that her windows opened upon a street and a canal, quarters whence it were not unwise to hope for assistance.

Ingram had been there before, and distracted as he was at discovering her absence, had done that

which perhaps, as matters stood, was wisest and safest. To rush on the stage, even should he succeed in finding his way thither, could avail little. If safety were to come from escape in the direction of the main exits, his help would come too late, would have been anticipated. If otherwise, there was danger, momentarily increasing, that the staircases and passages behind should be cut off by flames or rendered impassable by suffocating smoke. She might reach her room, only to be miserably caged there by the fire. The narrow windows were high above the street; to throw herself down were almost certain destruction, on the pavement, or on the parapet, or in the waters of the canal. It was clear what should be done: he should trust to the Preserver of all life that she might be guided to her room, and himself provide a certainty of escape if she should reach it.

Accordingly, he ran with violence down the staircase by which he had mounted, and, in the street, to his great relief, he came at once across Mark Brandling.

"For heaven's sake, sir!" cried the mechanic; 'Miss Jerningham!"

"Follow me, Brandling, quick!" replied the other, in a tone so resolute and self-possessed, that Mark did not think of questioning its authority.

They turn the angle of the street, and vault over the parapet of the quay into one of the gondolas which are beginning to shoot rapidly down the canal. The boatmen understand at a sign; at the single word "scale," they are across in three strokes, up the opposite parapet, and into a carpenter's yard hard by. They

and the ladder, long and heavy, which, with more than common might, they seem between them to handle as a toy, are soon across again. Amid the shouts of the people, who are now beginning to surround the building with the living girdle of their crowd, they hoist it against the window of Clara's room, and Mark Brandling springs up. He is not one moment too soon, for the fire, making wild work of all the ropes and canvas and timber and flimsy wardrobes and prodigious accumulations of ruled paper, scribbled over with music, —the "repertory," in theatrical language, of half a century,—has cut off all communication with stage or staircases. If there be any one in Clara's room, a few more minutes will seal their fate.

"If there be any one?" The hideous doubt had almost loosened his grip upon the ladder as he sprang up, and sent him, dizzy with despair, down headlong on the heads beneath. "If there be any one!" The bare possibility that there may not, flushes the brain which has so good need to be cool, dims the eyesight which has so good need to keep clear. What is it he stumbles against as he jumps down from the window-sill upon the floor, crushing the glass of which he cannot feel the razor-cuts on hands and face? He cannot say. The smoke blinds him, bursting in as he does from the cool night air outside. His heart swells with agony, poor fellow. She may be within reach of safety though faint and dying; but he can distinguish nothing; and the shouts of the mob down there make his brain reel. Oh, how he blesses the sudden, awful glare of the flame which now crackles in and licks up the very panelling

of the opposite wall! Appalling as it is, it shows him a female figure swooning on a chair. The vigorous arm which swings hammers daily is round its waist in a second, and out again through the shattered casement goes Mark, on to the ladder, drunk with excess of joy, but sobered by the tenderness of his delight. As he comes stepping cautiously and firmly down, shouts of applause again come up; they do not deafen now, they cheer him on. His foot is on firm ground again, he lifts the drooping head of his precious charge, and is stricken with a tenfold horror.

He has not rescued Clara!

Ingram guessed the meaning of his look of anguish, and understood his purpose as he turned again towards the ladder, grasping the rung above his head.

"She's safe, Brandling; safe, man! I tell you I have seen her since. Don't act like a madman. Look up there at the window: of what use would it be to mount again?"

Mark looking up, with a fixed, stupid gaze, came to perceive, slowly, that the flames were darting out of the window, and charring the top of the very ladder on which he stood. The pain and bitterness upon his countenance were sickening to see. Ingram shook him, as one shakes a man unwilling to be roused from a bad dream in which he has been stupified.

"I tell you, man, she is safe. Miss Jerningham is safe. Clara is safe! Rouse yourself and thank God for it."

Mark wrung his hand as he recovered himself, and with a hurried "thank God, indeed!" left all questionings or explanations for a fitter time; then, as became a vigorous working man, conscious of strength and of

intelligence to guide it, pushed through the crowd in the direction of the fire-engines, which by this time were in play upon the flanks of the theatre. There, conspicuous for size and energy, foremost among the most helpful, was the boating-man Digby, bare-headed, stripped to his shirt, or rather to the jersey which he wore in lieu of it. His braces, hastily converted into a belt, and knotted round his muscular loins, supported a fireman's axe of which he had somehow possessed himself. It would have done any one good to see and hear him. His cheery shouts and objurgations, ringing out for the more part in his own English mother tongue, with occasional admixtures of guide-book Italian, and stray morsels of Dictionary Latin, were yet perfectly comprehended and willingly obeyed. No man took his imperiousness ill, not even the light, active, swarthy Venetian captain of the fire brigade. A brave man he too, and ready. A single glance exchanged between him and the Englishman had ratified a treaty of alliance for the occasion. There was work enough for both to direct, and for every willing and able helper to execute under their direction, for the fire made furious head against all exertions. Flaring out across the narrow street in one direction, which thus became impassable, running along the topmost parapet in another, it seemed likely to set the rooftops of the whole neighbourhood in a blaze. That fiery train must be cut off at any cost; so saw fire-captain Ceccho, so saw Digby; and whilst the former, with cat-like agility, was clambering from knot to knot of a dangling rope which his firemen had hooked to a projecting cornice, the latter, followed by several of them, was swarming up a ladder. Mark,

astride upon an engine, whose heavy stroke his tread on this or that lever regulated and assisted, looked up, and could not help admiring the bold, strong bearing of the gentleman. What firmness in his footing there, aloft, close upon the blazing rafters. What keenness of accuracy in his eye, measuring the coming stroke: what supple, swinging power, in the delivery of that stroke when it fell. It was the very thing to win a craftsman's heart, to see the twinkle of that flashing axe-head rise and fall.

"Look out, old cock there, with the brass pot on your head! Look out, you muff, confound you! Mehercle! Fate il piacer! there's everlasting smash for you—procumbit humi bos!" And down comes a shower of hot stones, and sparks, and cinders, and great wooden beams. The man in the jersey springs aside with a bright smile which you can almost distinguish from below, and a joyous, hearty laugh, heard above all the crash and noise.

"A glorious fellow!" thought Mark, and the quainter Nemesis, avenger of absurdities—who often lashes them and cracks her whip as the cut comes, no less sharply than her more awful sister, avenger of crimes—gave master Mark a welt or two, neatly laid on, for trashy spoutings about "aristocrats, now bloated, and now puny," whereof she reminded him he had been guilty, in other days, at some young operatives' debating club.

Six months ago, perhaps, if Mark, in one of his vaunted excursion trips, had run down into Warwickshire, and, with other holiday sight-seers, had gone the round of the old Digby manor-house, under guidance

of its elderly and eminently respectable housekeeper, he might have sniffed and snorted at the series of old family portraits, which clothed with hereditary associations its time-honoured walls. He would have held, perhaps, as one long string of usurpations, that "catena of command," exhibited from the days of "Gervase Digbie, Escuire, Bearer of y^e^ Standarde to the most valiaunte and gentle Earle Philip of Chetwynde, in y^e^ yeare of grace, 1486," portrayed in plate armour, with bristling beard and grey moustache—through the times of Captain Churchill Digby, in flowing periwig, cantering upon a noble cart-horse in view of the field of Malplaquet—down to those of Colonel Digby, C.B., 100th Slashers, under whose portrait hung the sword of the French governor of Fort Hermanos, surrendered to him in 1811, when detached from the force under Lord Lynedoch (then Gen. Graham), after the fight of Barrosa.

Chetwynde Digby, on the flaming parapet up there, was wonderfully like that portrait of his father. Though Mark knew nothing of that, nor had ever paid the Manor-house a visit—yet one thing he was forced to acknowledge—that the heir of it, holloaing to the fireman, was a born leader and comrade of men, wheresoever and whensoever manly deeds were to be done.

CHAPTER VII.

EXPLANATIONS—A CRUSHED CORNISHMAN—MUSIC LESSONS AND TEA DRINKING.

THE questionings and explanations, deferred on the preceding night, came thick and fast upon the following morning. Clara was safe, though Mark had not borne her down the ladder, and though no such means had proved necessary to insure her safety. In her escape, the Viscount had borne chief part. From the moment that the cry of fire was raised in the body of the house he had kept his eyes unswervingly fastened on her. Followed by Digby, he had been one of the first to leap from the pit on to the stage. He had not become confused, as had the boating-man, amongst the intricate corridors at the back of it, nor thus compelled at last to find his way by a side staircase into the street before overtaking Miss Jerningham. He had held on straight after her, and had succeeded in reaching at the same time as herself the passage leading to her room, out of which he had induced her to accompany him in the direction by which Ingram had first penetrated there.

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It was Cousin Martha whom at so great risk, and in such urgent peril of her life, Mark had succeeded in saving from the blazing room. She had come running down a passage which led from the upper tier of boxes, through a door of which she possessed a private key.

Perhaps the draught created by her having left that door swinging open on her hurried flight had caused the sudden, irresistible progress of flame and smoke, by which after entering the dressing-room she had found all retreat cut off. She could give no precise account of what had happened in the interval between discovering that Clara was not there, and that she herself was now cut off from all escape by the corridor. She had sunk exhausted, breathless, and despairing into the chair, where Mark had found her. She had neither heard the crash of glass as he burst in to the rescue, nor had felt him lift and carry her out. Her stupor had made her as unconscious of his arrival and action as the terrible excitement and desperate hurry had made him unconscious of her identity whilst he carried her down. Thankful as he was, undoubtedly, for the privilege of having saved a life, and that the life of a kindly creature, his good friend, I am not prepared to assert that some feelings of disappointment and of envious regret did not mingle with Mark's gratitude when the whole case was made plain.

Poor Cousin Martha! It was not that Mark held your life cheap; but the life he had thought to save in his own strong loving arms was beyond all price for him. He would not have been overjoyed to yield the privilege of rescuing her to any man in Venice, or, in

especial, to any man of his Oxonian acquaintances; but there was no denying it—any one of them had been more welcome in supplanting him than Viscount Windlesham.

And yet, had Mark foreseen the effect of what passed that terrible night, he would have known that whereas few things could bring him nearer to Clara than having saved her cousin, or secure for him more constant and grateful remembrance by them both, the undefined sense of obligation she must needs have to Lord Windlesham, set him, seeing she had no sort of special affection for him, at a greater distance than before. Windlesham, to do his penetration justice, perceived it at a glance. Understanding that the matter was critical, he made up his mind to act, rather as if he had a lost intimacy to regain than any closer relation to presume upon. Clara's obligation to him was greater than she suspected. She had neither determined, nor attempted to determine whether Windlesham had followed her accidentally, or in the endeavour to find for himself also a way of escape; but, in fact, the hope of giving her help and assistance had been the sole thought impelling him to follow as he had done. Cousin Martha felt that Mark had come to deliver Clara. She would have had him do it at cost of her own life, and of his into the bargain; therefore, she gave him full credit for his intention. And there was nothing to lessen the favourable effect of this in the circumstance that he had actually been her own preserver from hideous and appalling destruction.

Had he saved herself there is no knowing how far Clara might have mistrusted the prudence of allowing

him to become forthwith a household friend; but the man who had saved for her the only mother she had ever known, poor girl, was wished for and welcome thenceforth at any day, or at any hour. The Viscount seemed to have made the running; Mark, though far from suspecting it, had, in effect, shot ahead of him.

There had been terrible anxiety for Trelawney, endured on the first few hours of that next day by his three friends. Exhausted by work or agitation, scorched, smoked, drenched, all they had said when meeting casually at foot of the hotel stairs, about four or five that morning, on their way up to take an hour or two of sleep had been—

"I say, old fellow, seen the Cornishman?"

"Not I, my boy; he'll turn up all right in time, and swear the blaze was nothing to the burning of the County Court at Bodmin, or the parsonage at Liskeard."

But when, after an hour's spunging, and a couple of hours' sleep, they met again, still early, at the breakfast-table, and in vain asked intelligence from the waiter of the "altro signor Inglese," they began to be first fidgety, and next impatient with themselves and with each other for being so. Soon they could not stand it; but with muttered excuse, or forced joke, jumped up by a common instinct, and severally announced their joint intention to go out and give a look after that "confounded copper-miner." No tidings could they gain of him, save always an uncomfortable rumour of a "povere si'or forestiere," who had been killed in the scuffle. "Ammazato per disgracia poverino," said the

gossiping facchini, with hints of their hard work that night, and of the desirable nature of a "bottiglia! siori!" Digby was enraged at the bare suggestion that this could be their friend. "It's all right enough, you blockheads; the poor chap's name who came to grief is Forester; all the cads had it pat upon their tongue; a Signor Forester, I tell you." Poor fellow! he spoke with temper, to keep down a gulping quiver in his throat, and could almost have struck Windlesham for his explanation that "si'or forestiere" meant a foreign gentleman, and did not profess to give a proper name. Ingram was the Columbus who chipped the egg-shell, suggesting, as the thought first struck him, that Trelawney had been in the theatre with the Vantinis, and that the most likely place to gain tidings of him must be the banker's palazzo.

"True for you, and a precious lot of muddle-pates we were, not to think of it at first. Trelawney's right enough, I bet you, pegging into the padrone's rolls and coffee, perched alongside of Miss Beatrice."

Three minutes brought them to the banker's door; it was close by the theatre; and one minute more sufficed to appease though not entirely to banish their anxiety. He was in the house, though neither "pegging into" breakfast, poor fellow, nor "perched" beside Miss Beatrice, but in bed with a broken leg, bruised from head to foot, and still unconscious. Beatrice, yet in her evening dress, was crying her eyes out in her own room, not having laid down all night, having sat up just as she came in, half dead with terror, distracted between fear and pity for the Cornishman, and the sudden surprising of her own heart's secret. Yes; there

was more than mere flirtation in it. She did wish, heart and soul, she were at Polgarthen, hard of sound as the name was to her lisping Venetian lips. She wished she were there, with a right to sit by Carlo Treloni's pillow, if he were in pain, or even to sit—poor child, that terrible scene at the theatre had terrified hope out of her—even to sit and cry by his grave in the churchyard at Mervynstow, if he were dead. For she knew perfectly well—oh, delicious knowledge! at thought of it the heart would seem to leap up exulting over all the terror and woe—that he had come by his hurt, perhaps by his death, just to keep her from hurt or harm. She looked on her bare arms; there was not a bruise on their rich brown cushions; for that, Trelawney's limbs were bruised and broken. How he had struggled against the desperate, selfish violence upon the stairs, of those who, by their insane rush and thronging, were ruining their own chances of escape in impeding those of others!

She seemed to have been lifted and borne along at one time without voluntary motion, yet nothing crushed her. His arms were like fenders of steel right and left. He must have slipped at the bottom of the stairs, just as she was bounding into the gondola beside her mother; for as she looked round, in that very moment of safety, she saw him fallen and trodden on. That was all that she could recollect, tax her feverish brain behind her hot forehead as she would.

Two boatmen had seen him fall in securing her: as the Vantinis were well known, when they had picked up the bleeding man, they laid him on the black cushions of a gondola as gently as they were

able, brought him to the watergate of the palazzo, and carried him up the wide flight of marble stairs, into the great saloon amongst the confused group of such members of the banker's family as had made their way home already. What was to be done? The young Englishman seemed half dead, and the broken leg hung limp. As for carrying him down stairs again, and rowing him all up the Grand Canal to the hotel on the Quay Dei Schiavoni, the thing was impossible, would be murderous. There was one only thing to do—to treat him as a son of the house, and lay him tenderly upon one of the son's beds till the surgeon should come, who must be fetched with breathless haste —"Quick, boatmen, quick!"

Such were the particulars, gathered by his friends from the kind Vantinis concerning the accident that had befallen Trelawney—particulars which Ingram, by that night's post, forwarded to his parents at Polgarthen. The scholar's mentorship among his companions was neither official nor expressed, yet recognised both by themselves, and by those with whom their party became intimate. The bond between them all was only one of those links of companionable friendship which make a happy commonwealth of a summer band of tourists from dear Alma Mater. Mutual acquaintance and attraction, and the exercise of a free will, wisely left to its own play by English parents, had brought them and must keep them together. There had been some vague talk of reading, when they should have settled down "somewhere pleasant," "sometime convenient," but not much had come of it. On some five or six rainy days on the expedition, Trelawney

might have construed, under Ingram's guidance, some couple of hundred lines of "Georgics," or "Greek Play;" and Digby, who was taking up Euclid for "great-go," might have involved himself in dark estimates of the relative values of squares and parallelograms; but these attempts had been abortive as well as arbitrary. Ingram had solemnly voted his "coaching" office a "mockery, delusion, and snare." When a question about "a fiver or two, old fellow—by reason that you know we *did* engage to let you grind us up a bit this Long,"—had once been mooted by one of them, he had met the proposal to bring in a "money-bill" with a peremptory veto. Nothing more was said upon the subject.

Easy, happy, manly, brotherly relationship! possible only between men in those golden years of youth. Enviable mentorship of a young man among his fellows, who acknowledge the stamp of intellectual supremacy in the first-class man fresh from the schools, and the nobler seal of a moral leadership, set on him by stainless worth and honour well known in the intimacy of college life to companions in lecture-room, in hall, in the barge, and on the Bullingdon!

I do not profess to know what equivalent other universities at home or abroad may have to bestow, but the pen of an Old Oxonian will not travel over the paper here without a word of heartfelt thankfulness for the happy freedom of the "system" which put such genial, glad relationship within the will and power of his own younger days.

Anyhow, the Vantinis felt that Ingram would hold himself responsible to the Trelawneys for their son;

and they insisted that his close continuance by the young man's sick-bed side should be made less irksome by taking up residence under the same hospitable roof. They would suffer no denial: the very next night found him installed in the palazzo, Digby and the Viscount remaining at the hotel. The former, however, had determined to postpone his "pluck," as he vowed an attempt to pass the schools that season must needs become. He had a couple of "grace terms" he might keep, so he would profit by them, and run down to Corfu to see "Billy in bottlegreen," as he called his brother, the newly-commissioned rifleman. "If the cock-shooting in Albania should turn out anything like what Bobby Snapper" (old Lord Snapperton's youngest son, at Brazenose), "used to brag of last Christmas, we're likely to have a good time of it. No fear for the copper-miner; Ingram will watch him like a Sister of Charity, and Miss Beatrice won't mind taking a turn when he knocks up. So, good-bye, Win; good-bye, Maestro and Mark Brandling; God bless you, Miss Jerningham; mind you don't fall in love with some Italian count or marquis now, and marry him, and turn contessa or marchesa, and never come back to England any more. Now then, facchino, that's not the way to knock a guncase about. Chuck us a weed; Win, my cigar case is in a peacoat pocket below."

"Al piacer, si'or, buon viaggio."

"Ta, ta, all of you!" And away paddles the Trieste steamer.

So began, and so, in one sense, was completed the break-up of the Oxford party. Ingram did watch like a Sister of Charity; if Beatrice did not relieve him

at the sick man's bedside, I believe it was not for want of good will. The quiet hours of the long night-watches, when the thick breathing of the patient alone disturbed the silence, when the tiny, floating wick slowly consuming the pure olive oil in the cup, alone redeemed the deepening darkness; those quiet hours, not unbroken by such muttered cries for Higher help, as in such soul-subduing seasons man's heart most earnestly puts forth,—brought to the student's mind the peace, at all events, of a clear and strong determination. A pang of "something too like hate" had made him wince, when, at the Vantini's party, Windlesham had assured him his evening would be more wisely spent in the library of the Armenian Brothers than in the banker's drawing-room. He had been ashamed enough, at the time, of the feeling with which he took the pleasantry, or, may be, the kindly interference of his friend. But he had seen farther into his own heart, as some others had done also by the glare of the burning playhouse. Very dark and very deep was the pit's mouth, in one corner of it, which the glare of that fiery night had shown him. It was no matter for compromise or trifling. When he had seen Windlesham accompany Clara out of the burning theatre he felt he could have slain him for jealous hate. Why this should have been, seeing he could have endured to look upon Mark saving her, it is not easy to determine, so intricate and unaccountable in its inconsistencies is the play of passion in man's wayward heart. To this one inconsistency his own attention was not drawn, nor, perhaps, need we speculate where he did not, closely as he seemed to question his

own spirit, arraigned of evil at the bar of conscience. No trivial indictment was preferred against it. The spirit of hate, the spirit of murder—he was too diligent, too reverent, a reader of St. John to forget their dread identity—stood confessed, present, watchful, on the point of action within. This other inconsistency was too obvious, too hideous in its obviousness, to pass unnoticed, or to be lightly absolved by him. What! he was to be Good Samaritan by Trelawney's bedside, fulfilling "the end of the commandment," "loving his brother," and yet willing to play the thieves' part in the same parable if Windlesham's case was in point; ready to strip him of his rare advantage, to wound him, to depart with savage joy, leaving him half, or, tell out the truth at once, whole dead? There might have been temptation of the world, and of the flesh to boot, in his irresolutions, vague aspirations, half repentings, unwilling conflicts hitherto; but now, for certain, the devil was come down into the lists to offer wager of battle. This dancing gleam of passionate love must not be followed; there had been danger of its luring him to quagmires. Tophet itself now gaped ahead of him. He must and would no longer hesitate, he would resist no less wisely than manfully,—in retreating. So soon as the Polgarthen party should arrive in Venice, and he should have consigned their son into their trembling, anxious, loving hands, he would himself leave Venice, leave Italy, leave all the happy, not unfruitful hours of cultivated idleness and recreation. He would go back, not to books, but to the work for sake of which he had been disciplined in books. He would go

back and work among men for men, and for Him in them, of whom he prayed for mastery in this hard battle.

Viscount Windlesham, meanwhile, took music lessons —not in the mere manual trick of the musician; his powers in that line for an amateur were already more than respectable. Besides, it would have been indecent to seek instruction in piano-thumping from such a man as the Maestro. The Viscount's coolness could not have kept a burning blush from his smooth forehead on preferring such petition. But there is so much deep science in the profounder knowledge, and more intimate sense of musical composition, that there was nothing strange or shocking in passing on from skilful inquiries, and from animated conversations for which one of the conversing parties took care to make due preparation, to a request, made modestly, with apparent frankness and with admirably-concealed flattery, that the illustrious compositor would deign to guide the feet of an ardent and enthusiastic neophyte through the more intricate and sublime paths of the sweet musical mystery.

Lord Windlesham, in determining on this course, had rightly judged the force of the fatherly feeling which bound the composer to Clara Jerningham. The Maestro did not distinguish in her the daughter from the artist, the woman from the singer and actress, that was hardly to be expected. In himself the "symphonetic" nature, if I dare use the term, was one with the whole conscious man. He was a manmaestro without intervention of hyphen between the terms; felt as such, loved as such, and was no more dis-

posed towards resolving Clara analytically than towards putting his own being into some white-hot crucible.

The Viscount divined this, and it did not require his shrewdness to perceive that the circumstances of Clara's professional life would prove so many minute, unconsciously-formed fibres of perpetual and close attachment between her and the musician. Therefore did he study thorough bass and counterpoint; and at the same time the character, guileless and good, of the man of genius who willingly taught him. The calculation was just and profound. Neither was that other of my lord's calculations devoid of penetration and exactness, whereby he arrived in due course of time at the conclusion, that if ever he should wish to hold the first place in Clara's affection and esteem, Mark, not the scholar, must be removed from the position. If ever he should wish it! Was there room for doubting the desire or intention? One thing was certain, he had a selfish pleasure in supremacy of any kind, natural or acquired, keenest, perhaps, in the latter, especially when its acquisition came by force of moderate diplomacy. Overtaxing his ingenuity was not more agreeable to him than overexertion of any kind; his enjoyment to be real must be easy-going. This gifted, bright, and beautiful Clara had come across him, his companions in travel, and the chance acquaintance made at the lake-side inn. Upon two of them, the men whose characters gave most promise of interest in analysis, she had made instantaneous and deep, if not indelible impression. What he felt for her himself was indistinct, nor did any thing urge upon him use or advantage in attempted discrimination; but he should like to put the others out of his way; and

leisurely, as was his wont, he set about so doing. Upon Ingram he knew how to act. What to do with the mechanic he made no doubt he should discover by-and-by.

Cousin Martha had discovered, entirely to her own satisfaction, what to do with "that dear good fellow," as she would call him. He was to be asked once and again, and yet again once, to tea. There was in this treatment a savour of the manners and customs of other far-off days in Camden-town; but the order and constitution of the artist life of Venice, now waxen familiar, forbade the realization of hospitable wishes according to her own ideal—an ideal not cloud-born, but reminiscence of former actual experiences—of tea-drinking. There were no muffins, nor any pound-cake: nor was the hour of the entertainment, nor the time devoted to the solemnities of its etiquette, at all in correspondence with past recollections or present wishes; but what there was was dear and precious beyond words to the young mechanic. The Viscount would have given his ears for it; and it was this:—there was just one half hour; Mark would perform prodigies of haste on the way home, to throw off the fustian jacket and the griminess of the day's work, in hopes of lengthening it by a minute or even a half minute:—just one happy half hour there was between the time when he could reach Clara's apartment and that when, upon theatre nights, her gondola would come round to the house-steps. A cup of strong tea, strong but delicate—Cousin Martha had intuitive gleams of a genius in brewing tea pithily yet tenderly, as rare as it is admirable—was the refreshment with which invariably at

that hour La Jernietta would fortify herself for the exertions of the evening.

Of this cup Mark should partake—such was Cousin Martha's decree. When the invitation had been made and accepted some three or four times at irregular intervals, Clara seemed to find that the strong sterling sense of Brandling's conversation, tempered and softened as it was by an influence she had not yet surmised, acted upon her own mind and temper as a tonic, and helped to brace her for the coming excitement and fatigue. Sometimes they would discuss together the cast of character and sentiment in the lyric drama, of which she was to enact the heroine; and though Mark were a man of a type about as far removed as may be from that of an ordinary dilettante or theatrical critic, the freshness, quaintness, and vigour of his remarks, gave unexpected worth to his praise or blame. There was in him also a concentrated latent fire of energy and enthusiasm which sometimes glowed sensibly, and by contact sent Clara fired with generous warmth to her task and triumph. Irregular intervals of invitation ceased; in fact, invitations were soon dispensed with altogether; and the Maestro, the only other personage privileged on any pretext to intrude upon that half hour of preliminary refreshment and rest, came to consider Mark's presence at the tea-table as much a matter of course as that of Cousin Martha, or of the teapot itself.

CHAPTER VIII.

DECISION AND DEPARTURE.

THE Trelawneys arrived at last. There had been some delay, caused by their absence from Polgarthen when the letter arrived which brought them the sad news. There were old Sir Charles, and Lady Trelawney, and their daughter, Georgina. Ingram met them at the water's edge, and led them straight to the spacious bed-room, the lofty proportions of which would have dwarfed the state pink chintz dormitory at Polgarthen to the humblest dimensions. There, mamma's arms and Georgy's were soon tender and fast round the neck of the patient, whilst old Sir Charles had a grip of one hand in both his, which nearly made Charlie the Younger, though no chicken till so terribly bruised, howl again for pain.

Presently, the father and mother, who had been too much excited hitherto to give Ingram due greeting, understood by their dear Charlie's look in how much they must be indebted to him, and each took his hand. As for Georgy, I verily believe she would have flung her arms round the neck of the dear friend also that had

nursed her brother to recovery, had she not with her quick girl's glance, noted the sad look which sobered on his countenance the gladness of the moment. She was a very keen-sighted pussey-cat, that Miss Georgy, for all her girlish years, and sweet girl's temper, and for all the childishness which her long fair curls gave to her laughing countenance; and she made other discoveries besides this first one before she had been a full half hour in her brother's sick room. She detected the constraint and inquiry with which the convalescent eyed his lady mother after a bit; and what's more, she was sharp enough to follow his look from the mother's face to the glass jar of exquisite flowers by his bedside; and what is more still, it did occur to her to marvel whether the sad-faced though smiling Ingram's fingers had disposed them so daintily.

When introductions and heartfelt tear-brimming thanks came on down stairs in the great saloon by-and-by, the rich glow in the brown cheeks of Beatrice, as she came perforce to shake hands also, did not escape Miss Georgy; and she, too, stole a look into mamma's countenance as Brother Charles had done upstairs, to see whether her eye also was in quest of intelligence. My own observations, I beg leave to say, do not precisely tally in their results with those of the great band of tale-writers whose theory of domestic events so often turns upon the necessary crass stupidity of parents. The Trelawney views of certain social matters were not extensive, as I have elsewhere hinted; but the eyesight of the Trelawney mind, or to speak more accurately, of the "Pentrennan-Trelawney" mind—Lady Trelawney had been a Miss Pentrennan of Trenhan before mar-

riage—was far from being dull or dim within the narrow circle of its own vision. If Miss Georgy were keen-eyed, I opine that the lynx eyes of her stately mother were simply reproduced in her; in fact, it was the searching look those dreaded maternal eyes had sent through poor Beatrice at greeting, which had brought up into her cheeks, deadly pale a second before, the glow which Georgy had seen mantling there.

Well, that terrible first interview was over, and there was at all events the doubtful consolation of being convinced that to keep her secret long from such lynx eyes was hopeless. Some better consolation, however, came that evening, when opportunity presenting itself of retiring unobtrusively from the group of elders in the room, Georgy contrived to draw her, just as Charlie might have done, into the balcony, and then and there did to her what she had refrained from doing to Ingram that afternoon—threw her arms round her neck and kissed her, the golden curls all showering down about her face and neck. Not one word was spoken as they bent to one another over the orange tree; but Beatrice understood that Charlie's sister would not refuse to fasten its flowers in her dark hair for her, should need be; and that she too would be glad to show her the peep of Mervynstow sea-shore through the break in the beech coppice at Polgarthen. The delight of this consciousness who shall picture? Not even shrinking from the lynx eyes could rob her of it; and the very next day there was another joy in store, unexpected, hitherto unhoped for; though in sooth it were a very simple matter of course.

Madame Vantini had never allowed Beatrice—no, not

once, and she did think it somewhat hard, poor child—to enter the room where Trelawney had been slowly but surely recovering. I will not say that never, never, on any occasion whatsoever, had Beatrice passed by when by a kind chance the door stood open, and a bright look of recognition could pass between them, or a hasty word of salutation be exchanged; but on the morrow of Georgy's arrival—yes, of that very arrival longed for, but dreaded all these weeks since the cruel accident befel—without reflection, without hesitation, till hesitation was too late, Beatrice found herself hurried by her new friend into the room, where Master Charlie, arrayed in shooting-jacket and other wonted garments, was seated upon a sofa, on which the broken leg was carefully propped upon pillows. She was astonished and ashamed at her own hardihood when she found her hand trembling in his. How wan and thin they seemed. She could have cried and kissed them; and was fairly frightened when Master Charlie for his part positively did begin to cry at hearing her broken expressions of gratitude and sympathy.

"There," said Georgy to the scholar, before turning round again from the window, out of which they were affecting with conscious complicity to inspect a passing gondola; "what the authorities will say to me for this I cannot guess; but it must have happened some day, poor things; so it's as well to have got it over; and now the signorina must just march out again at my command and in my company."

"The signorina must march out," thought Ingram; "yes, and it's as well to get a thing over."

"Charlie, my boy!" with a smile, "shall I put your

name on the list for great-go when term comes on? I shall be back in Alma Mater long before the first week, and the schools don't open till the fifth."

"Bother all imaginable goes, great or little," quoth the Cornishman. "One's tutor can't expect a fellow to cram up for examination after such a smash as mine. Why, term's not three weeks off; add five, makes eight. You've really no idea now how weak and bad a fellow feels after a thing of this sort. I do hope and trust—I mean I'm horribly afraid" (Oh, Mr. Trelawney, with what face was *this* emendation made, I wonder?)—"indeed, I am—I shan't be able to stir off this sofa this ever so long. And as for leaving this house—at least, I mean leaving Venice—for months yet; I'm happy—that's to say, I'm very sorry—to think it's out of the question altogether. I know the governor will want to be back at Polgarthen for the pheasants; and I can't help hoping—no, fearing—my mother will insist upon going back with him; but Georgy might stay with me till I can travel again. She and Bea—that is Miss Vantini—seem to get on so well together already."

That was a long-winded speech for an invalid, though desultory; and a silence followed, which Trelawney broke again when he had presently recovered breath, and also himself a little, out of a certain confusion, caused by its entangled delivery.

"What on earth put that vile Oxford into your head, man! that you should suggest 'great goes' and unpleasant subjects of the kind to one? You give me the shivers!"

"Vile Oxford, indeed, ungrateful imp!" laughed

Ingram. "Why, you are the man that vowed it was the only human habitation fit for a fellow out of reach of the Land's End, I remember. Vile Oxford, indeed, you villainous copperminer! What on earth put *that* into *your* head?"

This was a question the heir of Polgarthen was by no means prepared to answer; wherefore, ignoring it, he opined that as Ingram had long since "kept his Master's," and had "no team in hand to coach next term," there could be no reason why he, too, should not stay in Venice to travel home with him and Georgy.

"Why, there's not more books at the Bodleian than over at Saint Lazarus out there; and if a fellow *must* go boring and bookworming, why, couldn't a fellow learn Armenian? That must be tough enough reading for a couple of months or so!"

But his surprise—ay, and his sorrow—spite of Beatrice's and Georgy's presence left to him, were great and sincere, when Ingram made him fully comprehend that in all sober, serious earnest, a space of two days, instead of months, was the limit of his further abode in Venice.

"Come here, old fellow," said the Cornishman, "and give a chap your hand, can't you? And just stoop down a bit, when you know a party can't stand up to get at you." And he drew down the scholar's head till the forehead was level with his lips, then put a kiss upon it, and turned fiery red, and had two big drops in his eyes, and a thing like three walnuts in his "tieless" throat.

"There," he said, "that's how I serve my mammy if ever I am took worse at home, and she comes poking over me with physic bottles. And, living or dead, you

solemn old sap! I'll never forget you've been as tender as a mother with me, you school-quad owl, you!"

Windlesham's penetration was at no loss to divine much of what had passed in the mind of Ingram when he made known to him also his imminent departure. Be it said, however, to his credit, that neither by word nor look did he add to the constraint of the other. All his tact and social instinct, on the contrary, were exerted to make parting easy. It took him two whole cigars to deliberate upon the question, whether he should or should not interfere in any way with the guidance of the scholar's leave taking of Clara. Decision was in the negative, justly, generously, wisely.

Deliberation upon the same momentous subject cost his poor friend far other length of time, far other conflict of indecision. Morning came, full daylight of the last day he should spend in Venice, and found him, as the deepening twilight of the former day had left him, walking to and fro within his room. Glorious daylight it was, which came streaming in at the open window; with a soft wind from the southward. But that soft wind seemed cold to the sorrowful student; he shivered, went to the casement, and shut it. He did not attempt to shut out the light as well; perhaps there was no need to do so. Science, with her prism, will decompose a sunbeam for us, and divide the light-giving from the warming ray, and that again from the actinic. Deep feeling or strong passion in ourselves seems sometimes to possess no little of this prismatic power of decomposition. The sunbeam falls full on us, but the light-giving ray, the warming ray, are separated from it and

absorbed, and their blessed, cheerful influence unfelt. There was nothing very trenchant in the decision taken by him; yet it was no moral cowardice which left so much undecided after all. He would not go seek that dear, delicious, presence from which he himself, by a strong decree, had doomed himself to die out that day; but he would live these last hours just as his wont had been. He would spend his forenoon in arsenal, or church, or picture-gallery, as Venetian mornings are spent by visitors; his afternoon, according to his own peculiar use, in the Armenian Fathers' library; near to the time of sunset he would be rowed over to the Lido, whither their dispersed party had been wont to row so gaily and so constantly. Should she be there, he would take his last look into the dear, deep eyes, and touch her hand at parting, as any casual friend might do, and simply say, "good-bye," and mean it, as casual friend may not mean—mean it in all its homely, tender and true piety of commendation; good-bye!—that is, God be with you!

She was there. The Maestro, too, and Mark, and cousin Martha likewise. Windlesham misliked the self-denial which kept him absent. Notwithstanding, since he enforced it upon himself, he must be forgiven.

Was it cruel, or was it kind, that calm, strong, joyous unconsciousness of her's? It was genuine—about that he could make no question. Here were two men with whom she was walking upon the shore in converse, the music of her voice modulated and measured without art, without emotion, yet itself both moving and soothing emotion of others, as the ripple and plash of those alternate waves, which kept time with their talk upon

the low, sandy shore. These two men loved her, as life, and beyond it. And she knew nothing of it yet; nor understood that one at least of them was looking on her broad white forehead, as the seaman looks upon the light-house tower, above the jetty, whence he sails away, *not* to sail back again—and conscious of the "not."

The landmark of a life-shore from which he was putting out to sea! Why take it unkindly that it seemed impassible?

Cruel, indeed! How do her such injustice? She knew not, simply for that he never let her know what, so unconsciously, she had become to him.

Kind? There was no room for kindness beyond that which had been largely given in the confiding frankness of some weeks' pleasant acquaintanceship. Kind, indeed! Cruel had been any other kindness, in view of that determination from which he would not go back, nor wish to do so.

How strange, and yet how natural, appeared to him, in after times, the singular coincidence, that as the evening fell, and they looked out across the quiet sea upon the purpling mountains of the Frioul, the words of the Maestro should run in upon the mould and tracery of his own fancies, thoughts and feelings, to follow out and fill up all the groovings, as molten gold or silver might, poured in on the tool-graven steel of a Damascus blade in making.

"There is a sense," said the Maestro, speaking of the suggestion of symphonies to the creative mind of the composer, "in which we *do* presume, by saying, 'this was made for us.' Here now, for instance, close under our feet are grave-stones. Hebrew grave-stones, are

they not, Caro Signor Accademico?" inquired he of Ingram.

The scholar nodded assent; for they had wandered on and away to the spot, where, in the sandy soil of the Lido, the children of the Longer Captivity "bury their dead out of their sight."

"Well! here, I say, are grave-stones preaching of a calamity, a decay, a desolation, a death in life, such as not even the beautiful decrepitude of the fair city in the lagoons behind us can ever preach of. The eye glances over this field of Hebrew death, over its pavement of grave-stones, graven, with the characters once graven on the stone tables that He broke, who came down from Sinai to the Jewish forefathers." He paused for a few seconds, as well he might; as thou, reader, may'st have done; as he did, certainly, who traces these lines; though he were young, hopeful, and ardent in the day, when those rude Hebrew grave-stones, and the sedgy grass, tangled his feet there on the Lido, and bade him perforce look down and meditate.

"Venice behind us, down-trodden Zion at our feet; and the eye glancing on, as I was saying, on to that burnished flake of outspread water, across into the uprising purple distance!"

As he spoke, the eyes of all the party followed, of necessity, the course pointed out by the finger of his descriptive word.

"Above the toothset edge of those eternal hills lingers the sundown. That man said very well, Miss Clara, who said that sunset clouds, for all theirs is a dying glory, show more promise, tell more of glories beyond, than the brightest, rosiest clouds of dawn.

Do you think I cannot feel how great were the presumption should I say all this,—these graves of human hopes and loves, and hates; these recollections of the world's turning-history: this surging bosom of sea; those hills, the symbols of world-old unmovable materialism; those cloud-portals of sky, which are but shadow-gates, masking a resurrection light behind of life and immortality—all this is put forth as occasion only for a poor old Maestro's feeble phrase of interpretation by musical harmony?"

"Chè! chè! cari miei!" and he took out his snuff-box, the dear old man, much to cousin Martha's relief, who, to tell the truth, was "dazed," as they say, and staggered by the rhapsody: he took out the snuff-box, sure token that the speech was nearly run out.

"Chè! chè! cari miei: all this was not put here for me; and yet, Eppure Jernietta mia! vi dirò che si. This *was* put here for me: mine I will make it, though in truth I can own no possession of it; mine for the stirring of thought; mine for the tinting of fancy; mine for creation of some things; mine for correction of others. Yes! mine, though I be nothing to it,—as you shall allow, when I bring you my new symphony. 'Life out of living losses,' I mean to call it. Signor Accademico, do you think the title insane?"

Whatever the student thought, he answered nothing; and the conversation took, naturally, a more trivial turn, as they wended their way back to the more frequented and prosaic part of the long low sandy spit.

There was a little wineshop there, or coffee-house, in front of which were rude tables and benches of wood. A fiddle and a tambourine were being scraped and

thumped to a tune of mongrel type, between a transalpine waltz and a transapennine saltarella. But gay enough, nimble enough, vivacious enough, were the dancers; one of whom, a girl of lithe figure and cheerful eye, gave a deferential salutation to Clara, and one less constrained to Mark Brandling.

"Felice Notte Rosina!" said either in return; and then again, "Ed a te Tonietto!" as her partner, one of the water-carrying lads of Venice, with a dangling, bright-red woollen cap, divided his recognition between a nod and a bow.

The gondolas were very near; and the time was come.

"I fear, Miss Jerningham, that I must say good-night, and not only good-night, but good-bye."

"Good-night, then, Mr. Ingram; but why good-bye?"

"Because I start for England to-morrow afternoon."

"How very suddenly you're going," cousin Martha said; "and how sad so many partings are; first Mr. Digby, and now you. Why, what will Mr. Trelawney do without you, pray?"

"Oh!" said poor Ingram, with a very ghastly smile, at which Mark wondered, for he alone chanced to be looking straight at him, "I leave our Cornish friend in better hands than mine."

"Well, anyhow, I'm very sorry that you're leaving us."

"And so am I," said Clara, shaking hands.

There was strength in the man, for all his former waverings, for she neither felt pressure nor tremor in the hand which touched and took her own. Neither did he groan aloud, poor fellow! nor fall, for all the terrible pang which went through him, but walked quietly away:

CHAPTER IX.

ANCIENT ART-MAGIC.

READERS of tenacious memory must not take it ill of me, that having alluded casually, not many chapters back, to the Digby family-portraits, I must needs again say something touching such ancestral presentments.

At Digby's manor-house there were family-portraits, and so there were at Polgarthen. That is no fault of mine. Nor, indeed, can I well help it that, moreover, there were also family-portraits on the lofty room-walls of the Palazzo Vantini. All I can say is, I did not put them there. No! but John Bellini put one of them, and a rare one too. Angela Marini's, bride of Messer Eccelino Vantini. A sweet, grave, new-made matron she, with formal plaits of hair, just showing only from underneath a coif, with something of German severity of cut. She had a missal in her taper fingers, as she knelt before a gentle Madonna on the golden background. She seemed almost, herself and all about her, to have stepped out from some illuminated page of that same missal to kneel down there. The Admiral's portrait, on whose countenance the keenness

of the trader and frank manliness of the warrior carried on a marvellous contest for predominance, was the work of one Tiziano Vecelli, who had not found it necessary to sign the painting, by reason of a burst of gorgeous sunlight which his brush had sent streaming into the whole canvas from behind the prow of the Bucentaur, rearing itself in the middle distance. Streaming sunlight! yes! there was enough of it to stream across the wide room and give those wondrous gleams and sparkles to the jewelled brocade of the Admiral's youngest daughter opposite, married to a Barberigo when she sat for her likeness. There were as many, I believe, as four of Tintoretto's lively figures, full of action, but ash-coloured and livid in hue, beside the mellow radiance of the Titians. There was a younger Palma somewhere, and several Ridolfis, a couple of Padovaninos, and a Batista Tiépolo. The Polgarthen portraits, indeed! Poor dear Sir Charles! his heart sunk within him as his eyes wandered day by day over Signor Vantini's walls.

"And to think of his being a banker, Lucy dear! Just what old 'Farthings' is at Bodmin. Fancy the Farthing forefathers in this style!"

Now, good Sir Charles was defrauding that Cornish financial family of its due patronymic honours in these depreciatory remarks. Farthingale was the name, not Farthings; Farthingale and Clinks, a respectable firm, established A.D. 1726, by one Adam Farthingale, a successful "adventurer" or speculator in mining matters, who had handled a pick in the vein underground in his younger days, and "adventured" with equal success in a provincial measure, when he took to cautious banking in his elder time.

The Polgarthen portraits! He had loved them, that stout, old, countrified, county-family baronet, with a dim apprehension of art in his being, as well as merely with hereditary esteem. And now, when unexpected art instruction had overtaken him, he was half-ashamed of them, half sorry for them, spite of hereditary pride in their possession. He would sit and gaze on the Vantini portraits, divided between love and hate, till he could bear his feelings no longer: then he would get up and rush out; ten to one would hail a gondola, have himself rowed over to the Belle Arti gallery, and get more muddled and mazed with art-admiration and envy than ever.

But the lynx eyes looked poor Miss Beatrice through and through day by day; who found consolation, however, in Georgy, and in rare repetitions of that visit to the convalescent brother's room; and in the hope, now beginning to bud, of his descending, carefully, with a crutch, and with help from others on either hand, the flight of easy marble stairs which led down to the great saloon. The weather, which was autumnal now, was yet genial and fine. He would sit in easy chair on the great balcony, within sight and scent of the dwarf orange tree whose associations now seemed so familiar and old. Poor little orange tree! thy fickle mistress was quite prepared, if need were, to count any pot-herb at Polgarthen princely beside thee. Whereas, by strange inversion, master Charlie despised in comparison that wondrous lemon tree against the south-wall in the garden at home, which in the first blush of summer he had exalted, to his companions' indignation, above all orange or lemon bearing trees that sparkle in beauty

on the terraces of Isola Bella, or come sloping down to the glassy swell of Garda.

A lady with lynx eyes ought, one might opine, to have notions sharply defined. I should have expected, that nothing could have been more definite, more truly cut and dried, in fact, than Lady Trelawney's objections to Miss Beatrice for her boy Charlie, supposing such objections to exist. But people's characters will not be always of a piece; some of Sir Charles's vagueness had, perhaps, in this one instance, dimmed the retrospective vision of the lynx organs.

For eyes look both ways: out of the dark brain box to get photographs of things external; back into the dark camera, now become a stereoscope, to contemplate things photographed.

And Lady Trelawney, who saw all without as clearly as Miss Georgy, found indistinctness in her inward views of why and wherefore she judged matters so differently from that facile young philosopher.

I have suggestively mixed up Sir Charles's name with this; because I incline to think that in well-assorted matrimony there must be give and take in matters such as these. The perspicuity of one illuminating sometimes the foggy perception of the other; that fog in turn obfuscating at times the former's perspicuity.

It was great relief, well it might be, to the Cornish baronet's lady to discover, upon the first Sunday of her stay in Venice, that at all events there was no diffference in religious faith to render the notion of this marriage intolerable. Madame Vantini had been mistress enough of herself and of her husband, in this

respect, to have kept the liberty from the first of directing her daughter's mind in such matters.

Yet the sense of relief was but illusory, so long as her ladyship conceived herself able to thwart the match. There was really nothing to dislike in Beatrice; not much more to find fault with than any well regulated critical, matronly mind can detect, I take it, in any ordinary well-looking, well-disposed younger lady, paragon and paramount by love's law in a son's affection and esteem. Few things are more intolerable than to be swindled of a possible good grievance. Poor Beatrice! had she been Papist, she had been manifestly unpardonable; her being unobjectionably Protestant was very hard to pardon indeed.

After all, I suppose there lay at bottom of the good lady's heart no special ill-will against Beatrice; but only that pardonable jealousy which is angered at the thought that a stranger should have "intermeddled" with the heart's inmost "joy." "This man is my son! I bare him, and nourished him, and hatched the egg of his youthful bravery and manful tenderness against the warmth of my motherly breast! And this girl with brown tinted cheeks and silky black hair has robbed me of the firstling love of my first-born."

A mother feels it more bitterly in the son's case than in the daughter's. She is glad and proud to see the daughter's graceful weakness twine round some worthy supporting stem. Her own womanly consciousness of clinging preaches charity. But her son is strong; he can and should stand by himself for a long time at least, side by side with her and with his father. Tendril, leafage, or flower of any plant which shall twine

round that sapling so dear to them, comes only across the shadowless light and free air which have ever been glancing and playing between them and it. Whether there may or may not have been, by another most natural inconsistency, a scheme in germ in that mother's mind for giving some English girl at home leave and licence to steal the boy's heart, I will not say for certain. For all the seeming contradiction, it is not unlikely. Anyhow her ladyship was hostile, and it may be that she would have succeeded in infusing some of her feeling into her good husband's breast had it not been for the Vantini portraits.

Among them was one of which I have not yet made mention, a small round painting from the rare pencil of Giorgione. A female head, bending outwards to the beholder; the eyes downcast, almost veiled by the lids, from under which you might expect to see a tear come trickling.

Now Beatrice was a light-hearted happy girl enough, and her dark hair would only in the very strongest sunlight show any of that golden gleam which rippled for ever on the tresses of her ancestress as Giorgione painted them. Yet there was no denying the truth that mystic and persistent identity of look and of feature which will reappear from time to time in families, and, in spite of all discrepancies, proclaim the kindred blood. Beatrice was very like the picture in many of its characteristics. Her father, as she grew up, was often provoked to think that he had not forecast the circumstance, and called his baby daughter Stella, the name by which the portrait was known in his family. Her mother took such delight in the resem-

blance that she had long since transferred the picture from the place where it had hung so many years, and had enshrined it in the retirement of her own private sitting-room. None but the intimates of the house or the curiously precise in knowledge of the Venetian school of painters remembered any longer the existence of a Vantini Giorgione. Sir Charles, of course, was in total previous ignorance; nor was it till some time after his coming to Venice, and after some schooling in the scanning of Venetian masterpieces, that this ignorance was removed. But being one day introduced by some accident into Madame Vantini's inner nest, it is but justice to his growing powers of artistic criticism to say, that from the moment of his entering the room the Giorgione rivetted his attention. Madame Vantini thought her Cornish countryman more vague and abstracted that day than ever—not to say more puzzle-headed. He spoke without looking at her, answered incoherently; and, by way of keeping up the conversation, put questions at long intervals, wholly disconnected with its previous drift, answers to which he by no means appeared anxious to take in. For the remainder of that day the portrait haunted him. He tried a visit to the Accademia, but found no relief to his imagination, which caused filmy likenesses of its tone and colouring to cover and confuse the lineaments of any female face by any master, on which his eye might chance to light. For some capricious reason, or want of it, he said nothing to Lady Trelawney concerning the picture; neither did he the next day utter a word concerning it to its owner or his wife. But he cultivated her acquaintance, thenceforth with

new and strange assiduity; and spent treasures of Machiavellian astuteness upon contriving occasions to visit her in the little room, over whose mantel-piece the Stella was hung. By-and-by the picture got into his dreams as well as into his waking fancies, exercising over him the strangest and tenderest fascination. Yet it never occurred to him that all this while an image of his Charlie's Beatrice was nestling into his affections, nor that Giorgione's contemporary was pleading all along from the wainscot the cause of her young kinswoman. Stella, in her subtle witchery, was careful, as it almost seemed, to conceal from the worthy baronet the enormity of the fantastic trick she was playing him.

Such concealment could not last for ever. One morning,—the sunbeams were slanting across the room from under the folds of the heavy velvet curtain of the corner window,—Sir Charles had found it necessary to knock at the door of Madame's sitting room, and had opened it to enter before the "come in" could have reached his ear. Beatrice stood by the mantel-piece. Dark as her braided hair was, those sunbeams came athwart and gilt it gorgeously. She, too, was leaning forward thoughtfully; the lids veiled her eyes, out of which trickled a real tear. Sir Charles saw with astonishment two Stellas confronting him. The live one, startled by his entrance, looked up through her tears with a life-like loveable prettiness, such as even Giorgione's brush could not have bettered, and with that look won her way right into the kind old baronet's heart.

She did not know, nor did he, the full effect or meaning of the genial smile with which he looked upon

her; but the tear that was beginning to trickle seemed to dry on her cheek in its sunshine. Sir Charles nodded, almost unconsciously, at his original Stella, as who should say, "Well, I have done your bidding;" he was almost astonished that she, too, did not look up and give back, approvingly, sunny smile for smile. Georgy, a dear good girl, with not a particle of jealousy in her composition, soon marked and rejoiced in the change which from that day came over the manner of her father towards Beatrice. Courteous and pleasant it had been hitherto towards her, as towards all; but there was a kindliness in it now, and a tinge of fatherly playfulness, which neither she, nor Charlie, nor Georgy could account for; but from which, secretly, that hopeful trio augured the best. Not but what the two persons most deeply interested in the matter had occasional misgivings; not but what the gleam of the lynx eyes would sometimes cause the dried-up tear to show its crystal drop again on Beatrice's cheek. Lady Trelawney was not behind hand in detecting the alteration which raised the hopes of the juniors. Its origin was to her no less inexplicable than to them; she, too, had surmises and misgivings as to the turn which things would take. But being a wise woman, in her own way, she was well acquainted with the general fact, that the most inexplicable and unreasonable fancies are the most utterly inexpugnable. She knew, moreover, that this general fact had special force in respect of her own husband's character: wherefore she determined upon an armed neutrality; and left until the crisis of events the final decision of her own active course.

That crisis time brought, as its wont is. Whatever might have been the state of Master Charlie's heart, his bruised limbs and broken bones were healed and mended in unexceptionable order again. There was no sort of reason for detaining Sir Charles from the slaughter of Polgarthen pheasants, nor any colourable pretext for allowing his parents to return without their son, enviable as such an arrangement might seem. He had thoughts at times of handling the superfluous crutch awkwardly, and coming down, at any risk, headlong on the marble steps. Had any one left upon them a treacherous orange-peel, to his material hurt and discomfiture in slipping violently, he would have considered the inadvertence a piece of generous and considerate philanthropy. But no kind accident befel, and he must either leave Beatrice with distant and vague hope of meeting again, or take courage and say so much to his parents and hers as should secure leave for him to return again, or, better still, an invitation for her to accompany Georgy to Cornwall. Georgy, indeed, took a gallant initiative by openly suggesting to her mother the propriety of issuing such an invitation, on the simple ground of a return for all the kindness and hospitality shown to Charles in his day of trouble, omitting any mention of the special interest likely to be taken in the matter by himself. But the lynx eyes were far too sharp not to see through so flimsy a stratagem, and this move of Miss Georgy's was checked peremptorily. Time crept on, rushed on, Charlie thought. The day was fixed for his leaving Casa Vantini to join his family at their hotel; on the third from it the Trelawneys were to

leave Venice. They dined at the Casa on the eve of his migration, and, perforce, some renewed attempt was made, both by Sir Charles and Lady Trelawney, to express to the Vantinis the heartfelt obligation under which they lay. Desperate emergencies suggest and justify desperate measures; so when Signor Vantini, with no less sincerity, began to assure the English baronet that they owed to his son's manly self-devotion on the night of the fire far more than any care they had bestowed upon him could repay, Charlie burst out before them all:—

"Nonsense, Signor, about self-devotion! You know I'd have every bone in my body smashed small for Beatrice, and welcome! Since I've said so much I'll say more. I love her ten times better than life, and —— Don't cry, darling, don't cry!" so broke off his speech, as he turned from the Signor to his daughter, and seemed, in seeing her agitation, to lose all consciousness that any save themselves were present in the room.

"No, don't cry, Beatrice, dear," repeated his father, as the lynx eyes darted increasing amazement. "Don't cry,—though you're very like Stella when you do,—but go away into the next room with Charlie, and scold him for frightening you with his bouncing, and I'll say a word or two to Mr. and Mrs. Vantini about it, with my lady here."

"You dear good pappy!" cried Georgy, starting up, and locking her arms round his neck impetuously; "You dear good pappy! I always said, and always will, that you were the best, and kindest, and nicest, and——"

"Georgy, child, be quiet; be quiet this minute, or

Mr. and Mrs. Vantini will think we are going to beg their Beatrice to come among lunatics at Polgarthen. First, mad cap Charley, and then, Georgy, madder cap still! Be quiet, I say, child."

But she was out of the room before the sentence was fairly finished, off in pursuit of her brother and Beatrice to prognosticate coming triumph. The little gipsy was no false prophetess. Lady Trelawney saw clearly that with Sir Charles in inexplicable alliance the enemy must needs carry the day. She had hoisted no colours, so needed no mortifying haul-down of her flag. The conclusion of the debate in family council proved to be, that Beatrice was to go to Polgarthen, just to look round her, and see whether she could make up her mind to stay there altogether at some coming day. Into this verbal treaty crept a singular clause:—the best copyist in Venice was to have leave to copy the Giorgione Stella for old Sir Charles.

CHAPTER X.

MANŒUVRES—STUDIES—SEARCHINGS OF HEART.

INGRAM was gone; so was Digby; so at last were the Trelawneys. Lord Windlesham alone of the Oxonian party lingered on in Venice, acting with delicate reserve towards Clara, weaving daily closer his web of intimacy with the Maestro. The simple child-like, yet ardent and imaginative mind of the musician fastened upon him influences which sometimes almost made him cheat himself into forgetting that he was cultivating such intimacy for other sake than its own. The music which he studied, no less than the musician with whom he studied it, cast spells upon him, and more than reconciled him to his present mode of life. There was talk at home of his standing for the county. His father, the Earl of Wansford, had written, not to press the matter on him—an unlikely way of commending it—but to point out the strong probabilities of success, and to intimate his own willingness to make every such arrangement as should facilitate his son's entry into public life. For all his nonchalance, the young Viscount was not destitute of potential capacity for a parliamentary career, nor of such interest in

political matters as might ripen in time into political passion. But he suffered the county to go by default; and though he would have been at loss to give his reason for it, found no regret, but rather a sort of satisfaction in having done so. A sort only, because it is no easy matter, even for a self-indulgent Viscount, to give a wholesome fulness of content to thought and feeling, when putting about in sight of some haven of definite duty, to steer away, he knows not whither, upon a summer sea, because the waves look laughing and blue. However, there is something honest and real about actual work, whatever its aim and end, so these be not essentially bad, which does much to satisfy and soothe the mind, and to keep it in a good humour with itself, not quite ill-founded or unreasonable. The Maestro was far too earnest and enthusiastic to trifle with that science of music, which was to him the great reality of his life, and thus Windlesham had the advantage, or disadvantage, of exerting and sustaining sufficient mental energy to prevent him from feeling utterly idle. He was gratified by noting from week to week the entire justice of his calculation in respect of his position with Miss Jerningham, as fellow-student and associate in the thoughts, habits, and conversation of the Maestro. Any irksomeness which the claim upon her gratitude might seem to constitute was done away; not merely by his careful abstinence from pressing it, but by the circumstance that the new community of pursuit and study had its own new starting point. Thus a new and distinct familiarity of intercourse sprung up from seed sown at a new date, having its own separate

season of a distinct development. Mark's presence in some way marred this distinctness. Windlesham, who at first had watched with merely speculative interest the powerful attraction exercised by Clara upon the mechanic, began by degrees to fret thereat. His own feelings towards her were too vague and ill-defined to let him acknowledge fully the existence of any rivalry; yet little by little the notion that Mark was in his way somehow, and had better also somehow be put out of it, assumed consistency, shape, and colour, insisted upon being entertained, and after some fashion disposed of. True, Mark was a fixture, Clara not fixed at Venice. She had an engagement at Florence which must soon be fulfilled. The Maestro was sure to follow her, and so might the Viscount the Maestro. Mark must needs be less locomotive than those engines of Messrs. Bright and Brassy, upon the mounting and fitting of which he was engaged. But the visit to Florence would be temporary and transient. Not many weeks, or months at all events, would elapse before Clara's return, and there would be something of the easy, unsuspected tenderness of a return home in coming back to Venice and resuming Mark's homely friendship. This his lordship thought should be avoided; long and carefully did he reflect upon the best means whereby to secure its avoidance.

In thus designing he could not be fairly accused of acting against any real and solid interest of Mark Brandling, as positive minds would reckon. He might be thought by some to be compassing the means of rendering him an important service. Such manner of service as he had rendered Ingram from

the first moment, when detecting the birth of passion in the scholar's mind, he had persisted in forcing on it a full consciousness of that unaccustomed inmate's advent.

But, sooth to say, the Viscount could not entertain unreservedly the suggestion made at times by the genius of self-deceit, that he was pursuing an object of pure philanthropy in coming between Mark and Clara. He could hardly invest himself in imagination with the character of the craftsman's best friend, and he had too much self-respect to affect appearance of a friendliness which conscience would have stamped at once as hypocritical. There rose up therefore between the two young men a wall of estrangement and separation, strangely built up on the foundation of their easy earlier acquaintance. Its upreaving had upon Mark an evil enough effect. It seemed to furnish him with a fresh base whereon to re-erect the shaken statues of his class prejudices and superstitions of caste. The good result of his intercourse with Ingram began to fade away. He became moody, and not a little morose at times; and being occasionally almost rude to Clara, would thereafter suffer remorse and self-reproach, less wholesome than they might have been, by reason of the bitterness against the young lord which flavoured them.

The latter had in the meanwhile fixed upon his scheme of operations for Mark's removal from Italy. The county paper forwarded to him with a report of proceedings at the election in which he had declined to appear as candidate, gave him the clue to his desired combination. Thence he learnt that

Messrs. Bright and Brassy had just entered into a contract in their own line, entailing operations upon the property of the Earl his father, which would necessarily bring these gentlemen themselves, or some influential subordinates of their firm, into contact with Mr. Linton, land agent and confidential factotum of Lord Wansford's estates. To him, therefore, Windlesham despatched a letter, not without some previous hesitation, nor without many a subsequent pang. So far was it from being likely to do Mark any material harm that it was nearly certain to advance his interest with his employers. But, from the moment it was written the young nobleman felt the degradation of one who has not shrunk from stabbing an opponent in the dark. He could no longer bear to look the mechanic in the face. Not many days after its despatch he altered his determination of following the Maestro, and left Venice with the intention of appearing, as it were casually, in Florence about the time of Clara's visit to that city. Mark felt, when he was gone, as if a great weight were taken from his shoulders. But, in just punishment of his former fretful misbehaviour, he could not at once breathe again quite freely in Clara's presence. The very equableness of her demeanour to him throughout, and her generous apparent unconsciousness of offence, made him feel the more ashamed of himself and the more timid before her. Cousin Martha had always in her plebeian soul felt a special kith and kin affection for him, and gratitude had given it, naturally enough, an unlimited expanse since the catastrophe at the theatre. This sentiment had gifted her with sufficient penetration to discern that he was not too well at ease

so long as Windlesham was in Venice, and with a true woman's proneness to partizanship, she had in her secret heart vehemently set herself for that reason against the Viscount. Upon his departure, she was much concerned to miss the buoyant reaction she had expected in the temper and tone of her favourite. Unhappily, her want of tact served to increase rather than diminish his embarrassment. She put her finger clumsily to the sore place one day by asking him point-blank, how it was that "even now, when the young lord is gone, things don't seem to go smooth, dear Mr. Mark, and pleasant, as I for one had expected?" This inconsiderate appeal destroyed Mark's hope, in his more cheerful moods, that his unjust and fitful ways might have escaped notice. He longed for opportunity to acknowledge his fault to Clara, to say how necessary was her forgiveness to set him at peace with himself again. But to speak so would be a startling innovation upon the manner of free communication that had been hitherto in use between them; a great safeguard and sanction of which had been the absence of any sentimental personality. The most hopeful opportunities for explanation, the evening walks on the Lido, moreover, failed him, for the evenings closed in rapidly dark and chill. Mark had to bear the stern but profitable penalty which follows on offence against what must be loved, and this, just when his affection was passing through that stage wherein is diffidence and fear. But there was in all this a softening as well as a corrective process greatly to be prized by the true man. Much as he desired Clara's forgiveness, she herself had little notion that there was anything to forgive. She

liked Mark and esteemed him; but he had not upon her affections such hold as to make her careful and observant of all his varying moods. She had a large enough heart to have forgiven freely, had need been; but her appreciation of his tone and manner had not been close enough to inform her of such need. The artist was stronger than aught else within her; all which held not to the artistic sentiment and idea, was reckoned as yet among the lesser, fugitive, accidents of life. There was no man for whom she felt as for the Maestro at this time, save only dear old Sir Jeffrey Wymer. Him she could not but love as a girl might her grandfather; and her regard for the Maestro had much of this secondary filial feeling, determined not only by the difference in age, but by the relation in which as a musician, he stood towards her. Indeed, there was much of the truest fatherly character in the position which the Maestro had by degrees taken up towards Miss Jerningham. His simple character was far from deficient in weight and strength. It is not to be told how much annoyance, humiliation, and social danger were spared to Clara, at the successful outset of her artistical career, by becoming in a certain sense and measure the old composer's adopted child. Intrigues and even insolences, which might otherwise have at least assaulted her, were walled off by his continual presence and wise precaution. The authority and respect with which his professional standing and admirable genius invested him in the eyes of managers, artists, and lovers of the lyric drama, purified after such fashion for Clara the social atmosphere of her profession, that conscience, mind, and fancy,

breathed far freer in it than would have been possible under any other circumstances. Sir Jeffrey, at a distance, perceiving this, could lay aside not a few nor the leas anxious of his misgivings. He who had been her father's first and firm friend through life, under whose eyes she had herself been born, whose childish home had been brightened by the brightness of her childish beauty, whose ear had first appreciated the exquisite, harmonious, modulation of her glorious voice, whose musical intelligence and correct taste had encouraged and guided her first steps in the sweet science, could not remain indifferent to the marvellous success which from the first had greeted her, little as he had been disposed to consent to her courting it. He took a regretful delight in her budding renown as an artist, and not only by correspondence with herself and cousin Martha, but by an unsuspected vigilance exerted in other ways, kept himself well-informed as to all their proceedings. When fully assured of the Maestro's deep and sincere regard for Clara, and of the beneficial influence it must needs exercise upon her whole career, he wrote to the musician, and was more than satisfied, was touched by his reply. That first letter showed with what tenderness and what moderation its writer would use whatever influence he gained. Other letters passed between them, and few things could be more genial, few more graceful, than the correspondence which cemented a friendship between these men of years, just frosted by advancing age, in virtue of the fatherly love wherewith one and the other had endowed the young, fresh, blooming life of a beautiful and gifted girl.

Apart from any considerations which may be justly urged against a theatrical career in the case of any woman, Clara's life in Venice was far from morally unwholesome. She had the good sense to refuse any approach to social dissipation. Though there was not in Venice a drawing-room which did not open wide its door to her with pressing invitation, not one wherein she might not have been courted and admired, she persisted in leading the quiet, laborious, almost austere life of a student, a life in special sympathy with that of the laborious and frugal mechanic. She rose early on every alternate morning, when there had been no exertion the night before requiring longer physical rest and recruitment. She took a daily walk; she studied her appointed hours with the Maestro; she resolutely endeavoured to enlarge and complete her artistic intelligence and power by a course of historical and poetical reading. It is true, the "libretti" of the operas, in which she had to sing, were full of anachronisms and historical blunders, but these could only be made less tolerable by a monotonous and conventional manner. To be continually the same prima donna, with only a change of costume, could by no means satisfy the quick and lofty spirit of Clara. She endeavoured to train her thoughts and fancies into agreement with the real or supposed circumstances out of which the character of her parts had grown. These studies of hers introduced a new element into Mark Brandling's education. It was but natural that he should come thus to hear, discuss, and judge many matters which otherwise seemed to lie wholly away from his mental course. Books came thus into his hands which otherwise it was but little

likely that he should open. In the main instance of classical lore, Clara's ignorance of the original languages, parallel with his own, obliged her to draw from the secondary sources of translations and epitomes, whence it was as easy for him to derive information as for her. Neither few nor weak were the filaments which thus began to knit their minds together, though so fine as not to be forthwith perceptible. The constraint under which Mark stood just then with Clara, leavened with a little of the self-taught man's intellectual self-sufficiency, prevented him from showing openly by what steps and with what purpose of effort he kept thus lovingly alongside of her in these studies. That he should do so seemed to her but natural: and if Mark lost by her ignorance of his loving toil what she might have granted to recognition of his devoted desire to please, he gained in compensation all that inestimable advantage which a man gains by growing into familiarity of a woman's thought and feeling, she knows not how nor why. Seed was sown for that winter time of absence wherein it is ever uncertain if the germ shall crumble and die within the soil of hearts, if the blade that lives to shoot up shall be nipped and frosted, and slain, or if alternate rain and sunshine of a day not yet discerned shall bring at last to ripeness golden corn for harvesting.

That time of absence was now very near. If Mark had ever doubted the depth and passion of his love he must have learned it from the keen anticipation of sorrow which was settling down upon him. The simple severe realities of a craftsman's life had not favoured in his mind, naturally self-possessed and positive, the

growth of any fictitious standard of mental suffering; but in return, nothing in them had ever allowed him opportunity of frittering away his power of sentiment. Poor fellow! he could tell how truly that time of absence is a winter time by the chill which the icy breath of its approach was breathing into his very bones.

Now likewise a new torment, or a new phase of an old torment, was added to the several causes of disquiet and sadness which had fastened on him. A general and diffuse sense of jealousy began for the first time to creep over him, his experience of that passion having hitherto been personal and peculiar. The Viscount was gone, and Mark had no reason to guess that he was gone there only where Clara should come presently; but the last evening upon which she appeared at "the Fenice" disclosed to him another and an indefinite object of jealousy. She had won too sudden, decided, and constant fame with the Venetian virtuosi, to make it possible that her leavetaking for the season should pass unnoticed or ungraced by any special demonstration. Not content with thundering applause that last evening whenever she came upon the stage, nor yet with a perfect storm of flowers rained upon her, when at their call she stood forth to receive their homage after the curtain fell, her admirers organized a gondola procession by torchlight, with a subsequent serenade under her balcony, on the canal. It certainly was not the first time that Mark had been witness of that kind of homage which must be enjoyed or endured by such as Clara; but no instance of it had hitherto vexed and worried him as this.

Dissatisfied with himself, he could hardly restrain his annoyance at seeing her to whom his heart could not find courage to address a phrase of admiration, pelted by the trivial compliments of the playgoing crowd. He could not, or would not, now distinguish between the artist and the woman; what was tendered as a matter of course to the one seemed an intrusion upon the personal dignity of the other. This new feeling was not wholly selfish, nor born only of such mean jealousy as should say—"She is all to me, and I am hurt that she should be anything to them." Whatsoever in it came thence bore its fruit in mere vexation and punishment; but there was some other deeper, truer, principle moving in his mind to work other work, as shall be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER XI.

PIA—THE MAESTRO'S COFFEE.

GAILY and pleasantly, yet with profound respect, the Viscount bowed, sitting easily his English thoroùgh-bred, as the carriage, in which were Clara and Cousin Martha, crossed him in the Cascine, a day or two after their arrival in Florence. The worthy cousin, for a wonder, was wise enough to say nothing upon recognising him; but her heart fell within her. She was no judge of horseflesh; but had eyes quick enough to see that the animal Lord Windlesham bestrode—to say nothing of one more showy on which a groom in livery followed—was no hired hack; so she concluded that the Viscount had sent home for horses, and meant to stay for good and all that year in Italy. He had cautiously abstained from announcing an intention of so doing, but she had not seldom, already, speculated on the contingency.

For all it was a winter's day the sun shone brightly, and there was no wind; after a few turns, the carriage halted opposite the Ducal dairy, in the open space where the band plays in fine weather. By-and-by, the Viscount rode up to the carriage window to exchange greetings.

"How was the Maestro? Was he in Florence? What, not yet for a couple of weeks? Would he then not be present at Miss Jerningham's first opera night here?"

"Oh, dear, yes! he had heard from some of his friends. From Mr. Digby, who had found woodcocks in abundance in Albania, and would have sent a box to Miss Jerningham at Venice, had it not been for the intolerable slowness of the Austrian Lloyd's boat. No! He was not there now—gone 'to Syria, Persia, Egypt, and elsewhere'—so said his letter; not likely to be back this two years or more. Had heard of Mr. Ingram, too; not from himself, but through a mutual friend at Oxford. He had left the University and taken Holy Orders, as he had always meant to do: had been looking ill and out of sorts, his friend said: seemed to have something on his mind." Here the Viscount, without actually staring, looked full and straight with inquiry into Clara's eyes; but saw there, to his satisfaction, just what the mention of the matter was likely to bring into them, a polite half-interest, nothing more.

"Miss Jerningham probably knew more than he did of Mr. Trelawney's movements. Did Miss Beatrice partake of his admiration for Polgarthen, and all things Cornish? Any time fixed for the marriage?"

Then the talk wandered off to Florentine chitchat—musical and social—then came request of permission to call and pay respects at the ladies' apartments, made as a common-place act of politeness: then the hat is raised, the heel slightly presses the flank of the thorough-bred, and Lord Windlesham rides away.

"He took good care not to ask after Mark Brandling!" thought Cousin Martha.

The call, for which permission had been asked and received, was duly paid; but very little came, or could come of it, in the way of that easy visiting intimacy which circumstances had made not only possible but natural at Venice. As a kind of compensation, the Viscount had opportunities of meeting Clara in society. There were old Italian acquaintances of Sir Jeffrey in Florence, whose invitation could hardly be declined. Acceptance led, of course, to receipt of many others. As the Maestro was yet absent, as there were but two nights a week at the theatre, and as the probable shortness of her stay in Florence made Clara think there would be no great harm in relaxing her Venetian rule—there were not a few drawing-rooms, both English and Italian, where she found herself in company of Windlesham. He knew most people in them, and most things about most people; and thus was really not a little useful to Clara, giving her such information, or such hints at it, as assisted her in steering a wise course on these new waters. This he contrived to do in the pleasantest and least obtrusive manner; not even Cousin Martha could find reasonable cause of offence.

At one house which they visited, that of a widowed Contessa dei Guari, Clara was one evening asked to sing. As she took her seat at the piano she felt a draught from an open door opposite, and drew round her more closely a light shawl she wore. The watchful Viscount perceived the movement, made his way to the door, and shut it. Neither Clara's action nor his

had been noticed by the Countess, who at that moment was receiving the salutation of some late-coming guest. When, upon turning round, she saw the door shut, she moved towards it gently, and set it open again. In doing so, it struck her, as it had not done before, that the open door just opposite Miss Jerningham might be disagreeable to her. As soon, therefore, as Clara's song was ended, she went up to her, and putting her own hands together, begged forgiveness in the most engaging manner. "Cara signorina mia, I should have remembered that a cold air might come streaming through the door, although, in truth, all that suite is warmed throughout. The great black gap, too, right in front of you, must have been disagreeable and depressing; and might have checked the poetical feeling as you were about to sing. How shall I rightly beg forgiveness?"

It was in vain for Clara, in her turn, to betake herself to entreaty, that she would think nothing of what was nothing indeed; she seemed really distressed; and at last said, speaking rapidly, but with effort:—

"I will tell you the whole truth, signorina, for your deep blue eyes do not look cold as some. It was for Pia's sake, my poor darling Pia's, that I set the door open. She is a passionate lover of music, and she had heard so much of that voice of yours—so rich, so joyous, and yet so tender—that I opened the doors all through to her own room that its notes might reach her, where she lies, poor dear!"

To such words the only possible kind of answer was a look of interest and sympathy. It cost Clara no effort to assume it, for there were depths of tenderness

in her nature. The Countess spoke again, when she saw how her first words had been received.

"My poor child's spine is injured," she said, with a deep sigh, "and has been so for some years now. She is moved from her bed to her sofa, and very little farther, except on very favourable days, and then she is put into her great wheeled arm chair, and sometimes brought in here; but scarcely ever when there are persons present who are not of our own family. It is a very torpid, stagnant, physical life for her, poor child; but she makes up for it by her intellectual energy, and the quick play of a soul, lively, strong, impassioned, beyond what you could conceive."

The Countess rose, and after a turn or two through the room, not to be remiss in playing her part as lady of the house, was observed by Clara to slip through the door, doubtless on her way to spend a few minutes by the side of Pia. On her return she sat down again by Clara; laying her hand on hers—it had a tender and sympathetic touch—she said:

"Do not think it rude or strange of us, who, 'per disgrazia,' know you yet so little; but we seem to feel you are kind and 'simpatica.' Pia says she hears it in every note of yours. I tell her I have seen it in your eyes; and now nothing will satisfy her but looking into them herself. So she sends me to ask whether you will come to her bedside and let her do so!"

Clara contented herself with returning the pressure of the widowed lady's hand, and rising to follow her.

Although the most simple and natural thing in the world, there was something impressive in the sudden transition from the brightness of the saloon, with its

lights, mirrors, and flowers, to the dark rooms through which they passed, towa ds the shining of one little lamp, hung in a globe of ground glass, just over Pia's door. When that was opened, all the light in the room — clear though soft — was concentrated by a little careful skill upon the place where she lay propped on pillows.

"How good of you!" she said, as Clara went straight up to the bed-side, and without awkwardness, as without affectation, knelt down, to bring the face, which she knew that Pia wished to look upon, into the light, and under the sick girl's inquiring gaze. "How very good of you! I am sure you will forgive me even this;" and she slid the long thin fingers of her wan hands under the braided hair on either temple, holding the nobly shaped head of the English-woman firmly though gently between them, then raised herself a little to look down on it, with a minute, moving, exploratory action of her own lustrous dark eyes. There was a marvellous contrast, yet a strange affinity of appearance between these two. The frame, the features, the complexion of Clara, vigorous, healthful, clear, instinct with joyous radiance of life and beauty: poor Pia's frame, angular, without one rounded outline, her complexion pale and transparent, her features marked with the wistful grey blue lines, which pain draws upon the ivory of a sufferer's countenance. But upon the brow of either there was a loftiness of expression throned; around the lips of either a sweetness playing; and in the eyes of either a strong still depth of light, half veiled, which gave a kind of sisterhood to two such different countenances. At first glance it might have seemed as

if the Italian's face were shamed out of pretence to beauty by that of the glorious English girl. But in truth it was not so. Untouched by her sad injury, she too, would have grown into a comely, stately, maiden. All broken and wasted as she was, there was a spiritualized beauty of expression on her countenance, with which the firm round outlines of Clara's face, for all the finish and softness of their moulding, could not compete. Endurance and resignation, and the vivid realizing of better things hereafter, which faith stamps upon the mind and heart of sufferers in anticipated compensation, had given to Pia dei Guari a certain high type of loveliness that any thoughtful loving eye could not fail to discern.

She passed the tips of her thin fingers presently so smoothly and caressingly along the white forehead of Clara, that they scarcely seemed to touch the skin, and yet seemed to magnetise her as they passed. Then, with one of them, she drew the arches of the eyebrows one by one, and with both hands, held the head again as at first, and gently kissed the white forehead, next, almost passionately, the full ripe lips.

"Ah, pardon, pardon, dear young lady! but so much life, bright, and golden, and fresh, is in you, that it appears to stream out on me and warm and kindle me! Do speak, and say you forgive me!"

"May I come to-morrow to sit and read or sing to you?" was Clara's answer as she rose, took one of the thin hands into both hers, and patted it. "Your mother says you liked my notes just now, when I was singing; if you knew what pleasure I should have in letting you become familiar with them you would not refuse?"

"Mamma mia! Do you hear her? Was I not

right? Did I not say what I could tell of her from that deep sweet voice? She is coming here to-morrow. Ah! I shall find it hard not to wish the hours gone till she shall come: and that is wrong, the precious hours so fruitful and full: one has no right to wish them away. Good night, Miss Jerningham! Ah, you are smoothing your hair! I put the braids as little out of place as possible; but I could not help doing what I did. How they must be hating me in the drawing-room for having fetched you away. Go back again now quick to them; good night! good-bye!"

"May I?" said Clara to the Countess, when they reached the drawing-room; and she kept her from shutting the door, whence the incident had arisen. "I left your daughter's ajar on purpose."

Therewith she went to the piano, and sang a clear, plaintive, Venetian night-song, "almost louder," some critic of nice ear ventured to say, "than such music should have been sung." Though he were in the right, Clara had her reason for what she did; Pia must have heard every note and every word of the melodious "good-night" distinctly.

So private, so lonesome in a certain sense, so still and inactive was the sick girl's life; and yet so full were heart and mind of what would have been active energy, had Providence ordered its circumstances otherwise; that it would be hard to exaggerate the vehemence or the sincerity of the interest which she took at once in Clara. Not that there was in her a mere trivial and blameworthy love of novelty, nor any more grievous rebellion against what had been appointed and was unalterable, but that she listened to Clara's

account of her stirring, thronged, shifting life in the face of crowds, with that thirst for information, and power of gaining instruction from it, which makes so many choice minds read with constant eagerness books of geography and travel. For such books, read and pondered by such minds, do not merely bring enlargement of their knowledge of things in lands unseen; they give light and life besides to knowledge of things known and familiar at home. A restlessness is sometimes bred thereby; sometimes also a deeper, truer, capacity for rest.

Pia's life, contrasted with the artist's, must needs have shown to a meditative searcher some traces of that incontestable spiritualized superiority which might have been discerned upon her own worn countenance, even in the light of Clara's.

To have looked into the artist's life for mere contrast with her own, in deliberate hope of discovering grievances or deficiencies which should ease and comfort her own mind, by the reflection that out of her golden cup the gifted one must also taste bitter drops, would have been mean and hateful. Moralists too often teach us thus to learn contentment from looking on our neighbour's lot. But the penetration which an enforced thoughtfulness had given her, and long confrontation with stern enough realities of suffering and sorrow, showed of necessity to Pia much in Clara's career that was not yet apparent to herself. And if, from tiniest egglets of temptation, little wormlets of envy would begin to crawl into life, she was helped hereby to pierce out, with pin points of truth and wisdom, their poisonous and ugly little lives.

Clara's music was a pure and delicious luxury to the sufferer. "And this exercise of her gift,—so charitable, so sisterly, so different from that which brought upon her the ringing applause of the full theatre,—was no less delightful and consolatory to Clara. They had a small piano in the invalid's room, which they would wheel round so that Pia could see her new friend's face, when singing as she herself lay on the bed or sofa. Sometimes,—it was not what Pia enjoyed the least,—there was neither accompaniment, nor any rule or governance of the melody, save only the rising and shifting fancies of the singer's mind. On clear bright mornings, when no "tramontana" was blowing keen, when the windows were thrown open to the early sun, Clara would come in, with hands full of such gay flowers as never wholly fail the skill of Florentine gardeners. As she went to and fro, sorting and arranging them, playfully disputing with her friend about the placing of them, her song would be girlish, frolicsome, wayward, as in the first thrush-like days in Wymerton woods. If her daily visit was paid in the afternoon, and early darkness had fallen upon the palazzo, she would sit in an arm-chair, near the hearth, on which red logs of beech were glowing, opposite to Pia's sofa, and in soft minor keys, croon gentle dirgelike music, a reminiscence also of those early days when she would humour the tender melancholy moods of Willie Jerningham, whose thoughts had wandered down where his Benedetta's tombstone lay on the greensward in Wymerton churchyard.

This unexpected intimacy with the dei Guari, did not fall in too well with Lord Windlesham's design of

growing at Florence into deeper-rooted intimacy with his young countrywoman. With the Countess' family he had no close acquaintance. Pia had a brother; but "Orazio" was just then absent; there was no chance of becoming a family friend at the palazzo by sedulous cultivation of his acquaintance. Had this been otherwise, the doors of the sister's sick room would still have remained impassable barriers to the Viscount. He was reduced to be content with patience, or discontented as he might choose.

When in due course of time the Maestro came, he had more frequent opportunities of seeing and conversing with Clara, upon such pretexts as the resumption of his musical studies with their common teacher would naturally afford. On the other hand, the old musician's arrival was marked by a circumstance, ominous and disagreeable to his lordship, though to cousin Martha very cheering and comfortable. It was the frequent recurrence of Mark Brandling's name, in the course of conversation, at Miss Jerningham's.

The sturdy, manly bearing of the workman; his strong practical good sense; perhaps, also, his respectful devotion to Clara, had made, early in their acquaintance, a favourable impression upon the Maestro. And poor Mark, since Clara's departure from Venice, had done violence to his shyness and reserve, seeking out the old man, with a silent appeal to his social charity, not made in vain. The musician understood that for some reason or other, Mark found pleasure in his company. He contrived, on his part, to let the workman understand that he was glad enough to see him of evenings, provided no interruption were made upon him while

absorbed in his own work of composition. It came therefore to this: that daily, somewhere about eight o'clock at night, Mark would put a book into his pocket, and climb the stairs to the Maestro's rooms, on the third floor of an old Venetian mansion. Knocking lightly at the door, he would pause a minute or two, till it was plain that no reply was coming to the inquiring rap. Thereupon he would open the door noiselessly and put in his head, and seeing the Maestro with ruled paper before him, his hair upright, in bushy tangle, with, perchance a quill or two sticking out at wild angles, he would come in, and, without a word, walk to the stove and set on the coffee-pot. When the fragrant steam gave token it was ready, he would fetch out two cups from a certain cupboard, and filling them, put the Maestro's right in front of him upon the desk, still without a word—his own, upon a little table where a lamp stood, which he would light, and then sit down to sip and read; sometimes, I fear, with eyes fixed straight out upon the opposite wall, book upside down, and thoughts busy somewhere upon the banks of Arno. A whole evening might be spent, till the clock was upon the stroke of eleven, and not three sentences would pass between Mark and the Maestro: so the time would come for "good-night!" and a nod, and a departure, as quiet as the arrival. But there were other evenings, when a cheery "come in!" would answer the knock, the piano would be shut, the desk with the ruled paper pushed into a corner, and the dear little old man would hold out one hand to clasp Mark's, whilst the other grappled in the basket with a thick new log for the fire in the open stove. On such grand occasions, maybe there was chocolate, instead

of coffee, and little sugar biscuits into the bargain, of which choice dainties the Maestro himself was careful to do the honours duly. Then came pleasant chat, comparison and contrast of the artist life with the craftsman's, and strange discoveries of coincidence or divergence in the vein of thought and feeling. Then, by some fatality, the conversation would come at last to group itself and all its turns and chances round one person and one name. No tinge of jealousy, nor of possible rivalry was here to mar delight. At other times, it would even fall out thus:—Mark would serve out the coffee silently, and for some time the Maestro would tilt up the back legs of his chair, spinning it in a quarter circle, now deskwards to the ruled paper, now towards the instrument on which he would strike a few chords. On a sudden, conscious that the dictating voice of genius is hushed just now; or recognising the presence of a difficulty requiring patient deliberation and the decision of a rested mind;—not a note more is to be written down to-night!—he pulls the quills out of his hair, sends them darting across the room arrow-wise into the corner: spins round his chair for good and all, a whole semi-circle this time: rubs his hands together rapidly, and facing Mark, says—"Ah, Signor Vulcano, sei quà?"

Then, perchance,—oh how violent the beating of the young man's heart!—his hand would dive down into the depths of his great inner side-pocket, and produce a letter. "Di Firenze, Vulcano mio, si, di Firenze mi ha scritto la Jernietta. You shall listen, I shall read. Ah! she writes well a long letter to her old Maestro, the Jernietta, the dear Miss Clara, you shall hear!"

It was but natural, therefore, that the Maestro, when he rejoined at Florence his dear pupil and her cousin, should make frequent mention of Mark's name. Scarcely less natural that the Viscount should feel some annoyance at its reviving mention in their household talk.

Uneasy in the remembrance of his attempt to part the man more widely from his friends, he found it hard to speak of him with self-possession and unconcern. Whereas a pointed avoidance of the familiar name was awkward from the first, and might at last be thought significant.

Thus did Lord Windlesham at Florence, no less than the man at Venice, against whose possible rivalry he had condescended to plot, begin to pay the penalty of such wrong as he had done, by the suffering of inward disquiet, confusion, and annoyance.

CHAPTER XII.

ROSINA. THE "COLTELLATA."

COUSIN MARTHA was no Sévigné. She had no natural, nor any acquired taste for letter-writing. Her bringing up had been in those good old times in England, when, as yet, penny-postage was not; when, in the class of society to which she belonged, the despatch of a letter, or the expense of its transmission, was not that trivial matter, which, happily for the charities of family life in all ranks, it has since become.

She had thought, as the weeks went by, and budded and grew to full-blown months, of writing to Mark Brandling. She had purposed, first of all, to do so out of mere friendliness, and to prevent the snapping of any thread of intimacy. When fulfilment of such purpose had been so long delayed, as to give awkwardness to attempting it, unless upon some definite occasion, she had resolved to seize upon the first which should present itself. Such an occasion was the moment at which it was determined that Clara should prolong her engagement at Florence, not returning to the city of water-streets till a period much later than that originally fixed.

But at that crisis also some procrastination took place; to excuse it to herself, cousin Martha adopted the suggestion her fancy made, that Mark must needs have learnt all about it from the Maestro. He, however, had not written a single line, there being no urgent reason why he should—many why he might be absolved for the offence of omission. Sadly would cousin Martha have grieved could she have known what heart-weariness her long silence brought to the young man, for whom she had so much gratitude, esteem, and affection. An overpowering sense of loneliness, almost of desolation, settled down upon him, with fresh cold and gloom, when the Maestro went. A great change had come over him since the date, which seemed so far off, when work and study, with the nursing of political and social dreams, had been sufficient to fill up thought and feeling, before he met that artist girl of lofty brow under the olive-trees of Garda. Not only in regard of one absorbing passion had his meeting with her affected him. If it were true that all the "current of his being" had thenceforth "set to her," there had been movings in his mind, swirls and eddies, set going in pools and back-waters and undercurrents, other than the main flow. Now he was left alone, to feel all this, to gain such consciousness of the disturbance as he could scarcely realize, while yet the disturbing causes were present and in action. Vigorous and firmly knit as was his physical frame, these mental emotions, violent, keen, and continuous, began to tell upon its strength. That strength was daily taxed to the full by physical work, and of a kind which did not leave the intelligence wholly free. That twofold work kept the whole man upon a stretch, which

became an overstrain in more ways than one. When the Maestro was gone, Mark, foolishly enough, seeing how dark and cold the evenings were, and how chilling the night wind blew, would make his way over to the Lido, for anxious, solitary pacings to and fro. More than half tired by his day's work, these dreary walks would exhaust him utterly. When, on returning to his lodgings, he would enter the rooms of the honest folk, from whom he rented them, to light his lamp, or beg a shovelful of glowing charcoal for his fire, they were astonished and pained to see the weary sunken expression of his features. The bright-eyed eldest daughter especially took scrutinizing note of the increasing paleness and painfulness of his face. She had no scruple in bestowing those searching looks upon the countenance of the young Englishman, for she had a double reason to know that they ran no chance of being misinterpreted. The reader may recollect one Rosina, whose salutation, with her partner Tonietto's, Clara and her friends acknowledged, when passing by the dancers on Ingram's last night on the Lido. Rosina was the house-daughter at Mark's lodgings. Tonietto, her betrothed, one of those sprightly water-carriers, who show to such picturesque advantage in the streets and piazzas of Venice, with their saucy red caps, their striped trowsers tucked up above the supple bronzed knee, and their metal buckets nicely poised across their shoulders. Tonietto's claim upon her heart and hand, well known to Mark, was her first reason for feeling at ease in friendly relations with the Englishman. Her second was the shrewd guess she had made at the tie which bound Mark's heart to another woman. Rosina,

besides the ready help she gave her mother in thrifty housework at home, plied her needle point for a livelihood, as sharply and as briskly as those quick eyes of hers. The person from whom she got her work was employed in making theatrical dresses for the chief cantatrice of the Venetian opera. Hence Rosina found herself, from time to time, in contact even with the prima donna, and, of course, came to take much interest and to gain no little knowledge in what concerned the "personnel" of the theatre.

It is well known what charms for southerns, of every social class, mantle in the blue eye and gleam from the golden reflections of a northern beauty's hair. When to the impression, which the mere sight of Clara was sure to make upon the fancy of the Italian girl, was added that made by her frank good nature and unaffected kindliness, it is easy to understand that Rosina was soon enrolled amongst her warmest and most affectionate admirers. The poor girl's admiration went to enthusiastic extremes at times, and her notions of La Jernietta became strangely intermingled with those of queens and priestesses, and fairy-like beings which she sometimes saw her personate upon the stage. In much probability she would never have brought herself to couple thought of Clara with thought of the friendly working man, who occupied two spare rooms at her father's, had it not been, first of all, for the fact that both were English, the only two of that mysterious race with whom she had ever come into close contact. So much freedom and so much constraint; so much energy and so much repose; so much seeming pride and so much hearty kindliness; so much habitual gravity and so

much relish for humour; together with other paradoxes, discovered by the observant girl in the character of both these persons, unlike, in so many respects, to all other her acquaintances, inclined her, almost unconsciously, to class them together. Then there was another reason, less reasonable certainly, which seemed, in her judgment, to diminish the infinite distance she might have thought would stretch between one so far from her as the brilliant prima donna, and the sober-clad, toil-stained mechanic, so much nearer akin to her and hers.

Quick, observant, and keen as Rosina was by nature, her general ignorance was magnificently complete. Though Mark were a working man, and sweated for his bread, as did Tonietto, Tonietto's waterpails were intelligible, Mark's locomotives were not. Reports had reached her of the dread and mystic powers of those inexplicable engines, whose constructors and familiar handlers were no ordinary working folk in her astonished apprehension.

Then there were the books; the books and the working drawings; and, even beyond these, the mathematical instruments, which, sometimes, when he had studied late, Mark had left upon his table, and had not found time to put away when hurrying off next morning to his work. How she had marvelled at them, and at their possible uses, when she came in, after he was gone, to help her mother to tidy the room! She would dust them with a little fan of turkey-feathers, just as they lay; but neither she nor her mother—happily perhaps for Mark's patience—ever ventured upon handling them, or attempting to return them into those curious, flat, velvet-

lined boxes, their dwelling-place. Mark's work also, whatever it was, brought him, it was evident, some very different ratio of remuneration from Tonietto's. But to do Rosina justice, it was neither Clara's apparent wealth which set her up so far on high above all persons whom she had known; nor were they Mark's high wages, which brought him so much nearer to Clara than themselves, among whom the workman mingled upon an easy and almost equal footing. There was not wanting in the poor girl a nobility of conception, which made her try to measure things by some truer standard than the height of a pile of dollars.

Mark Brandling had in the composition of his character one element, which not only Rosina, but every member of the family had at once appreciated. He had a special tenderness for children. The toddlers in Rosina's family had been themselves the first to discover it; when Mark came home from work, grimy and toilworn oftentimes, there was among them a grand commotion. For them were the bunches of grapes he would bring home from across the laguna; for them, when no grapes appeared, the apricots or peaches, after which little hands soon learned to dive into his pockets. When autumn fruits were gone, and oranges were not yet come, curious stratifications of gingerbread, with gravelly deposits of sugar plums, were accountably discovered from time to time in those interesting cavities. One or two of such "giorni di Festa" as had witnessed the boating expedition up the Brenta, had been by the wonderful and delightful Englishman devoted to the construction of some simple mechanical toys, the marvel and the joy of all that

urchin tribe. His very name of Mark was to these juvenile Venetians a sound of good omen and patriotic fellowship; the barbarous "Brandling" being, by universal consent, discarded and buried in oblivion. Finally, by reason of certain magnificent lion-like roars, which he could indulge in, upon grand romping occasions, the name of the patron saint of Venice was exchanged for that of his Republic's heraldic symbol, and when the children wanted the Englishman, "Marzocco mio!" was the cry.

When it became plain to every one in the house that the good Marzocco was dispirited and downcast, sincere was the concern; when, one day, he fairly sickened and took to his bed, with flushings and shiverings and all tokens of an approaching fever, the sorrow and anxiety could not have been more lively had one of their own number been stricken down. They nursed him very tenderly those weary weeks—too tenderly thought Tonietto—in so far as one of the nurses was concerned. It never came to a violent or raging fever, but was of a languid and low type, such as requires the petting and humouring and watchful care of which motherly and sisterly women seem alone to have the secret. The very children learned to hush their noisy chatter, and to measure the tread of their bounding feet, when they accompanied their mother or Rosina into their sick friend's room. One, a girl of course, gifted with that charitable nursing instinct of her sex already, though not in her teens as yet, could even be trusted to sit for hours in the room, where the sick man was dozing, ready to give him drink or medicine; or, to call assistance should his need be too great for her young helpful-

ness. Poor foolish Tonietto! Would the knowledge that this child always was with her when Rosina had occasion to visit the sick room in her mother's absence, have helped to cool the heat of that unjust but uncontrollable jealousy, which was beginning to seethe in the red veins under thy bronzed skin? Truly 'tis hard to say, so fitful, wayward, and wild the passion is. Certainly Rosina spent treasures of pity upon the stricken Englishman; and pity is akin to love. But, in her, it was akin to the love, thou silly water-carrier, which her true little heart bore constantly to thee. When thou wast loveless and beggar for the priceless coin of love, imploring ever so small a mite of it from her, had she not compassion, did she not freely give thee more than thou daredst hope? Well, then! she has learnt to pity the poor sick "Marzocco" in the school of that compassion which drew her towards thee. As thou wert, he is; but what he craves he craves not, as thou didst, from her. Neither is it in her power to give what she gave thee. She gives him pity. Would'st thou, Tonietto, be satisfied with that dole and nothing more? Would that, then, have relieved thy necessity? Hast thou so far forgotten how such necessity can pinch hearts, as not thyself to be sorry for the sad Englishman?

Entirely to the purpose as such questionings would have been, no one, I believe, put them to Tonietto, nor did it occur to him, apparently, to put them to himself. He therefore missed of the soothing effect they might have had upon his chafed mind, and went about fuming, sulking, brooding, and giving such entertainment as he should have manfully denied to suggestions of evil anger and revenge. But Mark began to mend,

all the more readily, that being somewhat ashamed of his illness and its enforced idleness, he charged their victory over his strength in part upon himself, and upon his want of determination to resist the languid influence which had stolen on him. The rousing of his will was no ineffectual tonic, and did as much for him, perhaps, as the doctor's quinine. Yet neither roused will nor sulphate of quinine could make him suddenly well and strong again, though they might hasten the process of recovery.

The spring feeling of that year came very early, and the morning sunshine was very bright and warm. This also had much power of revival. The windows would be set open towards mid-day, when the freshness of the wind from the seaward was now warmed into softness, and Mark, at first with each hand upon the shoulder of a child of the house, would walk up and down his room. It was bare enough of furniture; but lofty and spacious, much fitter for a sick man's convalescence and incipient exercise than such a lodging as he would have occupied in England. Poor as were the people with whom he lodged, they lived in what had been a princely mansion in the palmy days of Venice.

Rosina's sympathetic little soul had been for some time set upon administering to the Englishman such a tonic as entered not into the doctor's pharmacopœia; such as even the young spring-time would not, of itself, waft in at the open window; and the time at last was come, when she found its administration within her reach. It was a costly remedy, as her active, charitable little fingers knew; she had worked at extra work,

early and late, to compass the price of it, which now, with a tiny contribution from the children's money boxes, was complete.

It was a better portrait of Clara than such popular lithographs are wont to be. Not a perfect likeness, yet undeniably suggestive of her countenance and expression. The head and bust were given and no more: underneath, a tiny circlet of stars, within it, the initials C. J. Rosina showed the natural good taste and judgment of her eye in making this selection, and in rejecting those many tasteless, not to say outrageous, disfigurements of the Jernietta's likeness, which gave her not only theatrical costumes, but theatrical affectations, of which Clara was certainly guiltless. Indeed, in this selection, Rosina showed correctness of taste and judgment in other than the mere question of art. Very subtle, very delicate, and touchingly true, was the instinct, which told her that what Mark loved in Clara was Clara rather than the Jernietta. This it was which really, by an unconscious process of elimination, made her reject all other portraitures of the artist, and fix upon the simple personal presentment of the gifted English lady. She had it glazed and framed, in a polished frame of lemon wood; and her scheme was to watch for the hour, when Mark, after his mid-day walk about the room, would lie back and doze in an arm-chair. At that precise moment, she would noiselessly hang up the portrait upon the wall just opposite him, so that his opening eyes should rest on the dear image in wonder and in joy.

It so chanced that on that very day and at the watched-for hour, the housemother was out, and all the

little ones had run down stairs to paddle on the steps of the canal. Tonietto had a spare hour on hand, and was come to spend it in a visit to Rosina. The children, plashing the muddy water on the steps, nodded an affirmative when he asked if their sister were at home. Up the wide staircase he bounded, singing as he went. No Rosina was to be seen, however, when he reached the rooms. He turned to come down again; thinking that, perhaps, the children had sent him up on a fool's errand in fun. As he came out, he saw Mark's door half open opposite. Moved by an uncontrollable impulse, he pushed it wide open and went in. He could not see the sick man's face: the arm-chair had its back towards him; but he could just see that he was in it; the brown hair showing a tuft or two on one side. And Rosina,—his own Rosina,—no! the false Rosina,—that hateful Englishman's Rosina,—was bending over Mark, so tenderly, so lovingly—her breath, if not her very lips, must be touching his pale forehead as she bent her down.

What wicked fire flashes in Tonietto's eye? What cruel steel in his hand? Quick as the thought of hate, revenge, despair, he draws a knife and stabs the sleeping Englishman.

He cannot double the stroke; Rosina, with a silent horror, more terrible than any cry, has sprung forward, and has caught him by the wrist, with a grip, of which he had not thought her weak woman's hand capable.

"O Tonietto! Misero Tonietto!" she says in a broken voice. "Tonietto mio!" with so deep and tender accent of reproach, that his heart at once misgives him he has made some terrible mistake. His heart

misgave him, and would have done so had she not uttered a sound; for her look, scared as it was, had gone searching into his, had never faltered under it, and—proof more significant,—had never wandered from himself to Mark until he dropped the knife, and crossed his arms, and said—half dogged, half repenting:—

"What have I done, Rosina?"

"Oh Tonietto! you have done what bad, and cruel, and unjust men do."

Therewith she turned to Mark, who, roused as much by the voices as by the sting of the knife point, appealed to her with inquiring look, quite unaware of the thin red stream which was beginning to trickle down from his right shoulder.

"Quick, Tonietto! pull off his jacket sleeve on that side; but gently; and now rip open his shirt, and let us see what the wound is."

Tonietto did not dare, nor did he wish in truth to disobey: for his, though a passionate, was not a malignant nature. There would have been something almost comic in the scene to any bystander, who should have seen how submissively, and how assiduously he waited, under Rosina's orders, upon the man whom, in his own wild freak, he had just stabbed. Happily, the wound was of no great consequence—the blade had but grazed and slipped on the clavicula. Rosina ran for sponge, plaister, and lint, leaving Tonietto to press firmly a piece of linen, torn from Mark's own shirt, and hastily folded upon the wound meanwhile. Neither of the young men spake a word in her short absence. When she came back, and had done her best for the Englishman's hurt, she took

Tonietto's hand and bade him kneel down with her; when, sheepishly enough, he had complied with the request, she entreated Mark simply, but touchingly, to forgive them both.

"Tonietto did it, good Marzocco," she said; "but he did it in blind love for me. He did not know that I was leaning over you to find out whether you were still asleep, or whether I had disturbed you by hanging up the picture of the English Signorina. Look there, you miserable, wicked Tonietto;" and she pointed, whither his glance and Mark's followed her nger, to Clara's portrait on the wall—"that is the lady the Marzocco loves, not a poor little sempstress like Rosina. Yes! I tell you, that lovely Signorina, whom you saw walking with him on the Lido, that is the lady whom he loves, as you once pretended to love me, you cruel, jealous Tonietto!" The poor girl's bravery gave way, and she began to sob, while the dumbfoundered Tonietto plumped down again upon his knees of his own accord, entreating pardon piteously.

CHAPTER XIII.

RECOVERY AND RECALL.

TONIETTO'S knife-stroke was not serious; nor did it interfere with Mark's steady progress to recovery.

Rosina found great reason to congratulate herself upon the efficacy of her present and its tonic power. In all probability the bare fact of her making it, and of her speaking as she did, under compulsion of Tonietto's misdeed, more than the presence of the portrait, and more than the words themselves she had uttered, contributed to cheer poor Mark, and to assist his bodily recovery by imparting a more cheerful tone to his mind.

That a third person, and that third a woman, should have coupled his name with Clara's in outspoken words —not lightly, nor in raillery, but with foregone deliberation, and under the influence of genuine emotion— could not seem other than an omen to his heart, at which it caught with trembling joy. There might indeed be some bond between her and him; the gap which sundered them might not be after all so wide

since the fancy of some other than himself could also dart across it an electric spark of loving fellowship.

Rosina had not said that Clara did, or could, by any possibility, love him; but she had said, plump out, that he loved her, and had not seemed to think the notion fantastic, inexcusable, monstrous, as sometimes it would appear to his very self.

That seemed no small gain to poor Mark in his present depressed and humble mood. It was the breathing of a ghost-like reality into some of those dear shadowy nothings, for whose growth and change into something real his whole heart seemed to pine.

Immense was his gratitude to Rosina.

It is indeed a very genuine, lovable, lasting sense of brother and sisterhood, which will sometimes grow thus between a young man and the woman, whose claim upon his gratitude stands on this twofold foundation,—her own admiring love for what he loves and prizes beyond all, and her generous divining and allowance of the truth, depth, worth of his affection for it. For a long time, not one word more upon the subject crossed the lips of Rosina, nor of him who now was her fast friend. Only sometimes, when, in his room, her look met his, it would glance off, close followed to Clara's portrait. If thence Mark's eye met hers, there was a smiling light of sympathy discernible. Tonietto, who had forgiven himself somewhat too easily, perhaps, when he found that Mark had forgiven him, and that Rosina would probably do so too, would even grin as his eye went between Mark's and the picture; but being detected in that indelicacy by his "promessa," he received such admonition upon the glaring impropriety of his con-

duct, as made him feel wondrously constrained and awkward, when the propensity came on him to offend again.

At last, there came a letter from cousin Martha. Mark's name, one day, had come up in the Maestro's talk, coupled with an expression of wonder at what he might think of their long stay in Florence. Forthwith Martha's heart smote her that he must, after all, be still in ignorance of the causes of this long delay. She, therefore, half in fear and half in hope of the answer, asked of the musician how long it was since he had written last to Mark.

"Written!" said the Maestro. "Well! I might have done so, had I thought of it; but in truth, dear madam, it never occurred to me to write at all."

Cousin Martha burst out, "I too, Signor, have never written him a line. Oh! how forgetful, how ungrateful he must be thinking me!"

That very afternoon she sat her down to pen a lengthy penitent letter, prolix and diffuse enough in composition; but to Mark, a boon inestimable. Written in kindly and familiar tone, its entreaty of forgiveness was a sort of endorsement of Rosina's allowing that he could never be a stranger to her or to her cousin. True, there was no more from Clara than "kind remembrances," over which expression, its exact force, and its more or less of conventional meaning, Mark spent more meditation than many a problem of mechanical or mathematical science had cost his strong and patient brain. But it gave many details, and said much of Clara if little from her. It told him of her health, and wealth, and unvarying, nay, multiplying success. If it

announced the unwelcome presence of the Viscount, it softened the sting of that announcement by mention of the fact that they were not so much, nor so often in his company as they had been at first in Florence, and might have expected to continue all along. It told of Clara's newly-made but close friendship with the disabled Pia; and, though deep in his hidden fancy, Mark may have sighed to think that Clara's presence had not been by sick bed of his, yet his own grateful experience of kindly presences by the sick bedside, made him delight in picturing her fulfilling some such ministration. Then there was hope held out of a return to Venice, not very distant, though not at any period fixed upon as yet. Lastly, there was not so much permission to write an answer, as evident expectation that an answer would be given. An answer, think of that! An answer to cousin Martha only, yet, one which Clara would read, or of which, at least, she would certainly hear. An answer, in which he might, without offence, write down the dear letters of her dear name, and send back some message—what message?—responsive to those "kind remembrances."

He had the wisdom to write very simply and straightforwardly, expressing his heartfelt pleasure at hearing from them at last, the weary difference their absence seemed to make in everything, and the joyfulness of the prospect of seeing them again. His recent sickness he mentioned only casually. On the announcement of the Viscount's presence at Florence, he maintained an absolute silence. To the Maestro he sent cordial greeting. To Clara, nay rather of Clara, what he found courage to say was no more than this, that the kindness of

her having in any way remembered him was felt too deeply for him to find any fit expression of acknowledgment.

And now his strength had come again. With a joyous reaction of spirit, no less than of body, he went back to his work: toilsome and hard, but not ignoble, nor ungrateful, for all he had it in his purpose to leave it by-and-by; if that in truth may be called leaving which consists in stepping onward from execution to direction. There may have been in the man some leaven of mere personal ambition. He had his faults, as I have shown already. It were overrating the present attainments of his moral character, to attribute to him freedom from "the last infirmity of noble minds." But he would have done Mark injustice who should have thought him set upon raising himself above the purely mechanical part of his craft, from contempt or ignorance of that nobility which is in patient, manly, craftsman's toil. A ladder was upreared before him, practical skill and manual acquirements the first rungs of it. On them, in early life, his foothold had been set firm. He might endeavour to climb, obedient rather to the perpetual invitation of increasing intellectual power, than to covetousness of personal exaltation. His was not that base and frivolous cast of character which spurns at an under rung as the foot leaves for an upper. Yet I will not say that his growing love failed to quicken in him desire and determination to pass from the handworkers' ranks to those of workers with the brain.

Had Clara been false to her own birth as a bookbinder's daughter; had she shown any kind of shrinking with the touch of her soft, white hand from the touch of

one which, delicate in its dexterity, was yet hard and rough in its strength; then his meeting with her would have produced on a man of Mark's temperament, a contrary effect. He would have clung the closer to his handwork, as a generous mind will cling the closer to an humble friend when his rugged genuine worth meets with undeserved depreciation from others. But Clara's whole conduct had been so free from pride, or seeming condescension, that there had been no shadow of occasion for asserting,—what she had never questioned,—the respect due to his own calling and position. His treatment by the Oxonians had happily left this tender point untouched. Having found nothing to work in him what other circumstances might easily have wrought—nothing to make him tighten for stubbornness, and indignation, and in a spirit of self-assertion, his hold upon his own rung on the ladder—it was but a natural result of intercourse with those whose occupations were intellectual and aims ideal, that he should definitely think of stepping upwards.

Little did he suspect the quarter whence, upon a sudden, should come the furtherance of his views, or at what cost to his feelings he should soon purchase the first upward step.

Mr. Linton, as the Viscount had correctly surmised, soon came to have intimate business relations with Mark's employers in England. At a loss to understand what possible interest the heir to the Wansford estates could have in the fortunes of a foreman in any workshop of Messrs. Bright and Brassy, the agent knew that young nobleman well enough to be certain that inattention or disregard to any wish of his was not

likely to be forgotten, perhaps not likely to be readily forgiven. He made it therefore his business, whilst keenly contesting, as in duty bound, all matters of consequence to the estate, to infuse into his dealings with the firm all possible courteousness and consideration. When one of the partners came down into the neighbourhood, for inspection and arrangement of works to be put in hand, he was not suffered to seek the venal hospitality of the Wansford Arms. The best bedroom at the snug house of my lord's agent was at his disposal. My lord's park furnished an admirable haunch of venison for dinner, and Mr. Linton's cellar was not despicable in regard of its own port wine. An occasional brace of pheasants found its way to Manchester; and when the shooting season came to a close, there were pike and trout from the Wansford waters. When the shrewd agent conceived that the favourable time was come, he watched his opportunity for inquiring, with compliment to the administrative abilities of the firm, about the selection and promotion of those in its employ; and, to be brief, found his moment for mentioning Mark's name, intimating that the Wansford people would not be displeased to see the young man advanced, if he were fit for it. The suggestion was favourably noted; the firm having an impression, perhaps not very definite, that Brandling was beyond the common run of others in his position under them. They determined, at all events, to recall him to England, and judge for themselves in Manchester what further use to make of him. The letter which announced his recall, was a simple business-like order to leave Venice on such a day "proximo," with a cheque, enclosed for payment of

expenses, "as per agreement" at the time of coming abroad in service of the firm, with a statement that such service would be required in England; but without intimation of the probable alteration in its nature or conditions. Nothing broke the violence of the blow to Mark's feelings, nothing sweetened the bitterness of his disappointment. The time was creeping on for Clara's coming. Rosina's fingers were already busy stitching finery for the reopening of the Fenice. Expectation beat in every throb of the young man's heart. Then came this letter, irresistible, inexorable. Fancy writing to Messrs. Bright and Brassy to beg a respite, until the first week of the opening opera season at Venice should be past!

It was a terrible opportunity for the tempter to whisper envious, rebellious, malignant thoughts again into the young man's troubled spirit. "That smooth-faced, smooth-handed young lord now! He was at Florence, where she was, this very moment. There was nothing to prevent *him* from coming back to Venice close upon her footsteps; nothing to banish *him* from the sunshine of her countenance, nor out of earshot of her thrilling voice!"

Poor Mark! sorely tried, yet dealt with tenderly in trial. Hadst thou known, nay, but suspected, Lord Windlesham's share in bringing this dark hour on thee, what shipwreck mightest thou have made in blindness of wrath and hate? Tonietto's knife-stroke had not killed charity within his volatile heart so surely, as within thy calmer sterner nature it had been slain by the rousing of passion, fierce and stubborn in ferocity.

Well was it for thee, Mark! that the meek English

mother, whose features,—she has been gone so long,—thou scarce canst call to mind, taught thee to pray the prayer of the Divine Teacher, to pray for keeping from temptation, and in temptation, for deliverance from evil: well for thee that thou hast ever prayed for both! Well, too, for thee, that thou forgavest the knife-stroke of the water-carrier, and so becamest capable of the forgiveness which, at best, thy fretting heart sore needed, when this thing befel thee!

Loud were the lamentations of the children at the announcement of the good Marzocco's instant departure; and if less loud, no less sincere the sorrow of his kind friend Rosina. Her only consolation was, that her notion of presenting him with Clara's portrait, was proved to have been kinder, wiser, and more fitting than she had forecast. By way of giving some practical vent to this feeling, she undertook the packing of that most precious article of Mark's little property. Never did choicest work of art, sent from under the artistic sky of Italy to a new home under English clouds, have nicer care bestowed upon its preparation to encounter safely jolts and thumps and accidents of the way.

"I know, Marzocco, you will take good care of it. Promise me to hang it up where the most sunshine falls in your dark room in England, where no real sunshine ever comes. Promise to look on it as you go out; to look on it as you come in. I want you, Marzocco, when you look on it, to think sometimes of the sunny room here, the old palazzo, and the canal down stairs, the madre and all the bimbi, who will cry their eyes out when you are gone. And you must think of poor Tonietto, who is very sorry about the knife, you know, much sorrier than

he seems, I know. E dopo di tutto, after all, Marzocco, you must think of Rosina, and remember that the last word she said was Coraggio!"

Well, the bimbi did cry; but were soothed by the glad necessity of playing with new toys, which, at the last moment, the Marzocco produced from his spacious pockets. Toniette, under pressure of dire threats from Rosina, should he be silent, began a confused apologetic reference to that unfortunate little knife play, an oration stopped in its incipient stage by Mark. Into his hand at the same moment Mark put a little fine gold chain, with a heart hanging under it; bidding him give it himself to his betrothed, that there might be no misunderstanding. Neither Toniette nor she knew what more Mark had done to testify his deep regard for her; how he had left himself nearly penniless, all but his journey money, to intrust a little sum to Signor Vantini, to furnish their room when betrothal should become bridal.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALMÆ MATRIS FILIA NIGRA.

OXONIANS know how pleasant a place is St. Sylvester's: how sturdy the castellated front of the low tower which guards the college gateway: how stately the pinnacled height of the taller pile, where hang its silver-toned chapel bells. Sylvestrians know, as not even other Oxonians can, how venerable, within, are those sacred chapel walls; what echoes from the fretted roof reverberate the hallelujahs of the quire; what tinted glories enamel the pavement worn by long footsteps of prayerful scholars, when the sun's last rays beam through the prisms of storied western glass. They know how that same setting sun inlays dark shadows of deep buttresses upon the green and gold of the trim velvet lawn. Familiar to them the cawing of rooks "creeping" homeward across an "amber sky," to their aerial thicket in tangled tops of elms, the growth of centuries. Familiar the plash and ripple of lightly-feathered sculls, the merry laughter of boy-men, floating down, under

the leafy boughs that dip in gliding water. Quaint traceries of cloisters within massive quadrangles; rich contrasts of flowers blooming beyond grey mouldering courts; mystic darkness of staircases with groined roofs of stone; bright vistas through open lattices over meadows dight with king-cups: what pictures rise before the whilom collegian who recalls old days, and thinks of St. Sylvester's!

College memories have the power of becoming soonest old, retaining yet their freshness. Except for those who linger on in Oxford as fellows, tutors, professors, or the like, aspect and use of places and things collegiate grow not into familiarity by course of many passing days. Three short years only, and the academic dream is over. But the time of dreaming is so singular, so strangely separate from all other time of life, that once over, it seems wondrous soon to have been over long ago. Imagination keeps no measurable account of such a time; not any more than of those seconds between sleep and waking, in which our fancy girdles oceans and lives whole cycles of events. Men in college live in sets, in separate generations for the most part. Predecessors of a year's standing are a kind of ancestors; freshmen of some three or four terms later, a sort of posterity. I fancy had Deucalion been but one-and-twenty, and had his Pyrrha bloomed eighteen, the week before the deluge, they must have seemed to themselves, the week after, monuments of a far-off antiquity. Among all the stones made human there was not one old face to be seen, nor one voice to be heard of old familiar sound. Of course, in Oxford it will not be till after some few years that the student returning shall

find all faces new, all voices strange, in Alma Mater. The "Dons" be there, that college aristocracy compounded of such contradictory elements; of the most active brains and the most sluggish temperaments in the scholarly community. The "old fellows," who are just "old fellows," and of whom it were hard indeed to give a fair description of any other kind. The tutors, active and energetic, intellectual captains, whose lead there are spirits among their pupils eager enough to follow; who must mismanage strangely not to leave some impress of their mind stamped on the least plastic of the men who line the walls of their lecture-rooms day by day. The younger fellows, of two kinds: those that have made obtaining of the fellowship of itself an aim and end; the scale of their being even now slowly quivers on the downward turn. Recruits for the sluggard brotherhood. Then those brighter, nobler, youngers, who fought more for fighting's sake than prizemoney, whose Ireland or Hertford scholarship, whose English poem read in the Sheldonian, whose Essay, which even noisy undergraduates applauded there, are their Victoria Cross, won in the intellectual breach.

Besides the "Dons," there are the minor college officials. The stout porter, the burly manciple, the sleek cook, the plausible scout, the impudent errand boy, his deputy. How it cheers one to return the nod, or the more deferential touch of beaver's brim, wherewith they recognise you! How delicious, spite of the conscious delusion, to see them shake their heads, and hear them affect a special interest in the ephemerides of one's own short singular day! Kindly hypocrites! To whom your

"good old time" seems what it was, a day before yesterday, no more, in whose primeval memory those monumental elder Dons live yet as freshmen!

Some years must pass before there cease to be familiar tokens, save on carved stones or wrinkled trunks of trees, to greet the old Sylvestrian at his revisiting.

Nevertheless, the collegian's own generation went when he went; he comes back as to an old world, grown old in a single day. An old world, ever new. New, not with novelty of repetition, but with novelty of an unfading freshness in his memory. The fears and hopes, the joys and sorrows, the failures and successes, the righteous resolutions acted out, the sins and shameful falls of that strange special time, keep their bold outline and bright colour there, as paintings done on the fresh plaster keep them, whilst later easel pictures fade, grow dim and die.

But wherewith shall I justify so rambling an exordium? Ingram had still friends enough in St. Sylvester's to feel it no deserted home; though he too sighed as passing up the dining-hall to the dais of the fellows' table, he looked right and left in vain for many a familiar countenance, in seats where strangers sat.

Dinner was done; so was the sober sitting over a glass of old college port in common room. Coffee was in the room of one Travers, a dear friend of Ingram's, a tutor of a few terms' standing only. There was one Mr. Curling present also, a junior fellow on the descending scale, and a third academic, a nondescript, between two ages, as the French say, sometimes, of ladies.

"The question is," quoth Curling—"by the way, Travers, are you too strict for a cigar?—Why can't men take life quietly, and let things which will go to the bad, by all means go there?"

As no answer was vouchsafed by any one to this comprehensive question, he lit his cigar, and, after a puff or two, returned languidly to the charge.

"Hasn't a man enough to do with keeping himself from going there without fussing about a pretence of keeping others from it? I believe, after all, the best efforts in that line don't do much."

"Hav'n't you shaken up two questions rather roughly?" said Travers.

"As how, precise one?" retorted Mr. Curling.

"Why, you started about *things* going to the bad, and what had best be done. Next about keeping, or pretending to keep *men* from going thither. Do you make men and things all one?"

"Well, I don't exactly know that I do, deliberately, and of fixed intent; yet, why shouldn't I? Things are a great broad stream, which, in fact, sweeps men down whether they will or no."

"What's that?" Ingram broke in, "have you stuck fast at the moral of the Greek plays, Curling, and written '*ἀναγκὴ*' over your lazybone's bed, like the man in the German Hospital story?"

"Oh. dear, no," said the other: "catch me writing one Greek syllable again anywhere, except under dire compulsion of that savage-eyed mistress '*ἀναγκὴ*' in person. But when I smoke, as I now do, the pipe of contentment, I muster Turkish enough to say Kismet, and half close my eyes."

"'Kismet, indeed!" cried Ingram; "I have never read Von Hammer's Turks; yet, I'll warrant the tribesmen of Ortogrul have pronounced that word two ways. One, when reeking from travel and battle, the trooper, who had fought hard for Islam, took the lost labour of the day, and, may be, the swipe of a foeman's sword across his snub-nose, with resignation; quite another, after centuries of stagnation, among ruins of what the fathers overthrew, of what their sons replaced by nothing new worth mention; amidst rank weeds waving over what were once glad corn-fields, trampled barren by war-horses, and never since furrowed by oxen."

"By-the-by," ventured the nondescript, "I remarked when I was in Turkey, towards the end of last 'Long,' that an ox's skull is often stuck on a pole by Turks to make a scarecrow."

"Is the observation quoted here '*ad rem*'?" inquired Travers. "Anything typical in it, think you, old fellow? Solemn confession of the final vanity of toil, or mere admonition of vague import to thoughtless cock-sparrows, bent on petty larceny in the corn?"

The nondescript was not a man to heed such interruption of his recorded observations, nor likely to be turned out of the beaten track of his utterances by the sparkling of any stray suggestive hints thrown out alongside. Wherefore he lumbered on:—

"It struck me that, very likely, those bleached ox skulls lying about, at shrines and temples, after sacrifices, gave the Greeks the notion of sculpturing them on the whatd'yecall'em, architraves, and so on."

"Well, really, my good fellow," answered Curling, "I shouldn't wonder if there was something in that.

The notion, if not quite original, is not destitute of probability, I allow."

"But, Curling," said Ingram, "let alone the metopes, and let us have it out, if we can, about the comfort of standing by with crossed arms to see things go to the bad, taking human sticks and straws along with them. Seriously, is that your theory of an endurable life? Can a man keep from going to the 'bad,' who thinks it enough to try and keep himself from it?"

"Well, I don't know that I am prepared to adopt entirely the '*suave mari magno*,' and to state it's a positive luxury to look on the distant grief of others in the flood. But though one may be sorry to see them struggle, the question is, whether it's worth while to jump in along with them?"

"What! Not even to pull one or two ashore?"

"Humph! there might be something in that, perhaps."

"Something in that, sluggard without a soul!" retorted Ingram, half joking, yet as one who utters a deep conviction. "Something in that! Your trumpery two-foot rule of 'something' will never measure the grandeur of the satisfaction in it. But I must have larger concessions. There's *everything* in it, I maintain—and more besides."

"Everything and more besides! Just hear the man. One would think he had turned Yankee politician, and joined the famous Now-or-sooner faction."

"I meant that there is every thing to satisfy—every thing to make it worth while, as you call it, and more besides that. I meant that quite independently of any gain of satisfaction, great or small, there is much to make one take the leap."

"What! One of those giddinesses which seize upon one sometimes, on a church tower or a steep crag, suggestive of one only conceivable pleasure, a bound, a somersault, and a grand smash at the bottom?"

"No! no! Not that; but the sure conviction that he who can only stand shuddering at others, fearing for himself, is even in greater danger than they, of being swept off and drowned by the deep waters which go over a man's soul."

"A terrible thought," said Travers, "yet, I fear, a true."

Mr. Curling had no strictures to offer upon the turn he himself had given to the conversation, farther than an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders; and the nondescript having upset and broken a coffee cup, the disturbing incident put an end to the talk.

Ingram was up at St. Sylvester's to take his Master's degree, his place of work being as unlike academic Oxford as could be well imagined.

Newton-Forge was the district, of which the pastoral duties, young as he was in ministerial experience, were committed almost entirely to his care. It was a large new-built suburb to an overgrown town; and had been called into existence chiefly to provide houseroom for the families of men who swarmed in the sheds and workshops of a great junction railway station.

Two curacies had been offered to his choice. One, a quiet upland village, with acres of fine tilth, and meadows where cowslips grow; the squire's house is embedded in pleasant coppices; bartons, rich in stacks, gird the farm houses; the church tower is grey, draped with dark satin mantle of glazed ivy; yew trees, whence

staves were cut for bows that twanged at Cressy, shadow the turfy mounds of rustic graves.

The other, such a congeries of cinder-paved streets as the very name of Newton-Forge, and mention of the railway junction, will summon into mind. Long formal rows of two-storied houses stand clay-red or mud-brown, according as successive batches of brick burnt well or ill. Roofed with slate, they exhibit shutters mostly on the outside; the ascent to their threshold is up three stone steps, whitewashed and sanded every Saturday afternoon. There, the objects most nearly resembling trees are lamp-posts, and what æsthetic reverence the outward fabric of the church can claim, must arise from its superior bulk, its yellow ochre bricks in contrast with the prevalent domestic red, and the pointed arching of its latticed windows, triumph of the local builder's vague predilection for Gothic.

A learner no less if not more than a teacher, Ingram knew he must be in either case, when so novel and so solemn duties as awaited him were first to be discharged. For so young a man, he was more than ordinarily well read; but the book of men's hearts, and the reading aloud out of them, profitably to themselves, is another lore than that which academic studies teach.

Of peasant men, such as they whose toil brought to their fine tilth the acres of that upland village, and who worship in that grey church with ivy-clad tower, Ingram knew little, say rather, nothing. He had no insight into their habit of thought, mode of feeling, utterance of speech. Having none insight, he feared how it might go with sympathy. Whereas, concerning the men in fustian, who peopled the red or brown

brick houses in that unlovely suburb, and who should have worshipped, if they did not, within the ungainly yellow ochre church's walls, there was this to note, that his latest born friendship and intimacy had been with one of them. He was no vulgar specimen of their class, yet had in fulness and variety many of its special characteristics. In their long and many conversations, he had shown to the Oxonian, unconsciously at times, and at others, with purpose, no few things touching his fellow-craftsmen, their peculiarities, their cast of thought and feeling, unhappily too often strange to men of Ingram's calling.

He judged, therefore, that the recent and note-worthy circumstance of his acquaintance with Mark Brandling should determine his election: so it came to pass, that because he had walked upon the Lido at Venice, he went as curate to Newton-Forge.

At St. Sylvester's they were sorry to lose him. They had reckoned upon his standing for a fellowship at the next vacancy; there was scarcely a vote among the electing body which would not have been gladly recorded for him. Travers and the tutors, with all the active-minded members of the common-room, who understood that there was work in abundance, of right noble kind, in academic life, had been expecting to be reinforced by a valuable recruit. Curling, and the more careless sort regretted in Ingram a companion, who, if not like-minded with themselves, was of gentlemanly manners, cultivated understanding, and generous temper.

His choice of Newton-Forge, as against Summerly, was to the latter division of his collegiate friends a

further subject of perplexity, perhaps of a little vexation. It was made in defiance and contempt of every axiom of their own facile self-indulgent philosophy. Such unspoken, unintended, rebukes are often the most suggestive and disquieting. Curling's insinuations of the needlessness and futility of interference with the current of other men's mischiefs, may very well have been dictated to him, without his knowing it, by the chafing of reproachful thoughts, roused into quicker life by Ingram's presence within college walls again.

Within those venerable walls he had now a few weeks to spend, in well earned diversion and rest. He had so truly enjoyed the rational student life of Alma Mater, in his day, had found so much pleasure in its social habits, that he had feared what might be on his mind the effect of such a visit and of its reaction upon a worker, wearied for the first time, by a spell of such work as his at Newton-Forge. But though his collegiate holiday was full of pleasant refreshment, he was relieved, perhaps a little surprised, to find how soon and yet how deeply the strangely dissimilar life, whence he had come, had burrowed into his affections.

College life may well be, and is to such men as his friend Travers, not only busy and laborious, but earnest and practical. Yet for all that, he seemed to himself on coming back to it, as one who might return from a campaigning ground to a fencing school, from a railway survey over flood and fell, into a class for linear drawing. When he came up first from school to college, he began, as the custom is of them that take the gown, to call himself a man, and in good sooth his college career had been manful and manly. But now, he came

back thither from among "men," in a rougher, sterner sense of the word so full of meaning, and could not but be conscious of having intensified his own manhood by contact with theirs. He enjoyed—how could he fail to do so?—his present sojourn at St. Sylvester's, but looked forward without regret or shrinking to return into the cinder-paved suburb. He had fast friends there. Not only such as every zealous, kindly, clergyman conciliates in every place, thanks not so much to anything in him as to the strong impulse of loving souls to attach themselves to him who ministers in matters they have near and deep at heart; but he had made some friends also among those who hang back often from the "parson," young or old. For their friendship, full of interest and value, he was indebted, in great measure, undoubtedly, to that respect and fraternal spirit which he had learned from Mark Brandling to entertain for them. Messrs. Bright and Brassy had a large establishment in Newton, and his acquaintance with their working foreman at Venice proved an excellent introduction among that class of his parishioners.

Ingram had the wisdom—less common, even at a date so little distant, than it has since happily become,—not to hold himself aloof from such associations as existed among the men for mutual assistance or culture. He was soon enrolled among the committees of their benevolent societies, and sat on that of their incipient Mechanics' Institute. Here his zealous cooperation was of the greatest value to those among whom he was thrown. They came to understand, and to value the man's "aptness to teach." Though they began by recognising it in other matters than those to which his

life was specially dedicate, yet, there grew in not a few of them a gradual conviction that the young clergyman's teaching was not in any matter to be despised; that, contrariwise, it might be profitable to grant it, in what he never shrunk from proclaiming as the highest, deepest, purest, noblest lore, the same respectful attention as his ability and sincerity soon won for it in other things.

Ingram's old Oxford training clung about him too closely to let him be content at the Mechanics' Institute, with that mere lecturing which in Alma Mater was known, and perhaps undervalued, as part of "the professorial system." From the first moment of his connexion with the Institute, he attempted, not without fair success, to form classes for regular and definite instruction; for "lectures" in the "tutorial" sense; and this he was enabled to do the more readily that his accession to the ranks of the society took place at an early period in its history, before it had yet stiffened into more showy and superficial habits.

To say that he encountered no difficulties, that he had to contend with no doubts or misgivings, that he made no mistakes, nor even any enemies, were, of course, to say too much. His was a disposition keenly sensitive, and a conscience exquisitely tender. He, therefore, had his discouragements, and his occasional temptations to despond; yet, there had been vouchsafed to him so considerable and hopeful a measure of success, and of conscious influence for good, that he had been strangely ungrateful to the Vouchsafer had not his heart learned to cleave to the work in hand. Besides, since the whole truth is to be told, he discovered, when at his ease

in Oxford, of how great help to the subduing and consolation of his heart, troubled in one respect, had been the constant, practical, absorbing, self-forgetting nature of his occupation at Newton-Forge. Not that he wavered in his determination, when once again within the much-loved precinct of St. Sylvester's. It still seemed manifest to him, that such an affection as had fastened upon his mind may fulfil an office for good to men in two distinct and different ways—ennobling some by its own growth, development, purification, and fulfilment; others, by painful struggle against its dominion and manful consent to foregoing of its sweetness. It still seemed to him undoubted, that in his own case, the good must come by that second searching discipline. But at St. Sylvester's, the practical pressure of life seemed to be lightened for a time, and imagination therewith to gain freer play. Old associations there, were all in favour of this. Not that the image of Clara, whom he knew not then, had haunted his fancy there in former days; but that there was room for it to come in now, and fair reception for it, amongst those remembered aspirations which, vague, flattering, harmonious, and beautiful, will visit the glowing fancies even of a studious youth in the golden mists of those days of choice.

He would find himself in early summer mornings, before the chapel bell called with melodious tenor to morning prayer, sauntering by the lilied banks of Cherwell, bethinking himself how willows dipped in the waters of the Brenta, and what thoughts moved him as he watched their dipping. Or sometimes, at evening, as the towers and spires of old Oxford grew

purple dark against the western sky, a red gleam, as from the lagoons, would flash from the windings of Isis through the flat meadows; the campaniles, domes and turrets of the fair Water-queen would seem to fashion themselves in air before him; the music of the nightingale, from neighbouring thickets, would strangely gather human modulations in his ear; he would remember how the plash of Digby's oar would hush itself, as returning from the Lido, Clara's notes poured forth in rapturous song.

Indulgence of such musings he was too wise to concede, but repression of them was difficult and painful. Return to Newton, and to his daily round of duty there, came thus to wear the aspect of return to a haven of peace. Strange, ever-shifting motion of man's heart! Whither it cometh for rest and refreshment, thence for refreshment and rest, it will and must go forth again. Oh, for the deepening within of hope, desire, conviction, foretaste, of such rest as he finds not here! Rest, it may be, nay, must it not be? wherein is yet activity undying.

Alma Mater—gentle mother—endearing name, which gratitude, esteem, and love of generations have given to great Universities! I insert, with purpose, that word "great." Of these "great" nursing mothers I would say, happy they, whose sons feel their greatness in its true proportions. Nursing mothers they for nations, not for little cliques of scholars. Good is it, therefore, that from special closeness of their maternal embrace, those favoured ones, which their breasts nourish, should come and go, bringing from far knowledge and feeling of the wants and woes of children who never

have been folded, nor can be, in such fostering arms. Good it is that there should be kindled and kept alive in the maternal breast, remembrance and care of those *τέκνα ἄτεκνα*, no-child children, as the Greeks might have said.

Ingram was doing a good work in his short stay at St. Sylvester's. He was, by many points, in close contact and sympathy both with the men there, and with those, in some respects so different, whom he had left at Newton-Forge. In hall, at "high-table," in the cosy "common-room," and out on the smooth lawn, on whose velvet the bowls roll glistening satin stripes, there was talk, inquiry, discussion, and suggestion concerning the grimy workers in brass and iron. A wholesome interest was excited in them and in their like, and in the possible fellowship between learners and workers, between the home of Muses and the hives of Industry. Connexion and community of interest, obvious enough as one might think, yet such as the old, outworn, childish hostility between town and gown, added to natural indifference and carelessness, prevented many a collegian from clearly and vividly discerning.

Light and warmth glowed ever in the sacred fire, tended by Vestal care, upon the altar of the circle-temple, whose unbroken column-girdle stands yet by brink of Tiber. That altar was the nation's hearth. Ἑστία, Vesta, hearth-goddess she was, whose honour lived in the glow and upspring of that perpetual flame. Rude hands might not profane its tending in the sanctuary. But the jealous tending care forgat its own true meaning, if ever it grudged that light and warmth should thence be carried to the homely altar of the meanest

hearth in Rome. More sacred shrines have Christian hands built by Cam and Isis. On their altars, fires of learning and of science glow with far more sacred light and warmth. Yet will such sacredness much less consist with envious concealment, or exclusive jealousy. Not for self-culture of mere self-adornment were planted stately groves in our holier Academes. "Freely ye have received, freely give," is the divine motto which might well be carven above each arch of entrance there "Dominus illuminatio mea," is written on Oxford's open heraldic scroll. "The Lord is my light."—"*My* light!" but that same is He who "lighteth *every* man that cometh into the world."

Long and earnest were the conversations which Ingram held upon such topics with friends at St. Sylvester's. It may very well be that nothing came of them immediately. Men of the Travers stamp might not see forthwith their own way to follow in practice theories admitted to be sound. Men of the Curling stamp are not easily impressible with notions which demand for imprint consent of will to active self-denial. But time works wonders, seeds seeming dead have sprung into fruitful life at last.

CHAPTER XV.

CRAFTSMAN AND CURATE.

A RULE of the Mechanics' Institute at Newton-Forge, enacted that names of candidates should stand a week, at least, upon a paper on a board in a conspicuous position in the reading-room. Beneath it was a box, into which the entertainer of any serious objection might insert a confidential letter to the committee; provided always that he signed his real name. Great was Ingram's surprise at perceiving, one day, as he looked upon the board in passing, the following entry: —"Mr. Brandling, Assistant Engineer, Messrs. Bright and Brassy's." The name is not uncommon, in the northern counties, whence such captains of industry as Mark's employers recruit many skilled hands, guided by shrewd brains. He, therefore, could not feel certain that it was indeed Mark's name he read; and the description appeared more dignified than what his friend, the foreman, would have claimed in Venice. He lost no time in questioning the secretary, who referred him to a person, in the employ of Messrs. Bright and Brassy, as authority for the inscription

of this name upon the list. From him he ascertained that it was none other than Mark Brandling's, who had been working abroad in the service of the firm; by what chance he had left Italy, and what was, if any, the change in his position, his informant was unable to say. Mark was an old acquaintance and workfellow; he had simply written from Manchester that he was likely to come to Newton-Forge, and wished to avail himself of any library, reading room, or institute in the place, which would enable him to get at books, drawings, plans, and the like: "things for which," he wrote, "you know my turn of old, and of which, seemingly, I must now make more, and if I can, better use than ever." He had merely dated from the office at Manchester, saying nothing of what had brought him thither or had befallen him there. "But one thing, Sir, is certain, he's a rising man; though he says nought about it, ye may take it for true; he comes here instead of Mr. Simpson, the canny young Scotchman, who's gone out to some other foreign work our folk have just put in hand." And so it proved to be, when, a few days after, Brandling made his appearance in the work-sheds of the firm at Newton.

Truly cordial was the greeting between the young men, Mark's surprise exceeding that of Ingram. Yet both soon came to understand that there was no startling disconnexion between the separate currents of event which had again brought them together, and both held it for certain that some wise and good direction had guided the coincidence. This common conviction disposed them both to knit more firmly and more

purposely close the bands of their former intimacy. Mark could cherish inclination to do this without let or hindrance from any antagonistic feeling. Nothing could be more natural than that he should freely do so. No generous effort for extinction of any sense of rivalry was needed; for he had not read the secret of the student's heart at Venice. With Ingram it was otherwise. He knew not, indeed, whether a successful or an unsuccessful rival in the field whence he had ridden out so bravely, was to become to him a brother; but for a soul less generous and noble than his own it had been surely sufficient to bar brotherhood, to know that when Mark looked him in the face the eyes of a rival met his own.

Ingram occupied part only of a house larger than most in his district. It had been built in times preceding the growth of the suburb which had gradually hemmed it in, and incorporated its larger proportions in one of its most irregular streets. It might have stood, garden and all, in its best days, within the cortile of the old palazzo, where Mark had been lodger to Rosina's family; and the chimney tops would scarcely have reached the "loggia," or open balcony upon its second floor. But it was known as the "big house" in Newton; and rents there were too high to permit the curate to enjoy the whole of so stately a mansion. Mark caught gladly at his friend's suggestion, that he should become second lodger to the owner, a respectable widow, who had seen better days. Accordingly, he was soon installed in two rooms, upon the ground-floor, which, by reason of the narrowness of the street, and of its canopy of coal-smoke, realized but

too well Rosina's prediction concerning the perpetual absence of the glad sunshine.

The curate's rooms were on the first floor, rather lighter and more airy than Mark's; and though far from luxuriously furnished, somewhat more cheerful and habitable.

The history of Mark's recall from Italy, and of his advancement in the firm's employ, was soon told so far as he could tell it. He had himself been told at Manchester, that, as his friend here had surmised, Mr. Simpson's departure made a vacancy which must be filled; that his employers, having had his name recommended to them, and believing that he might be found equal to the duty, had determined upon recalling him to ascertain the point. He had been submitted to a technical examination; had been tried practically by serving for a few weeks under an able superior; and apparently had given satisfaction under both ordeals, since he had been sent to Newton Forge as successor to Mr. Simpson. The firm were not expansive in their communications with subordinates; and nothing more explicit having been volunteered by them, Mark had not thought fit to venture upon further inquiry.

It was several days after his instalment on the ground-floor of the "big house," that Mark unpacked Rosina's precious gift and hung it up over the mantelpiece of his sitting-room, now "tidied" and in seemly order. He had occasion to go out earlier than usual the next morning to the worksheds, and had not mentioned the necessity overnight to the curate, in whose room he had been sitting, so that Ingram was spared the necessity of having to face the portrait for the first time, and unexpectedly, in pre-

sence of another. He, too, had gone out, later than his friend, to the early service at the ugly church; and on his return, bounced in to see whether Mark would come up stairs and breakfast in his room.

Mark was not there,—but there was Clara.

One of the few sunbeams that contrived to straggle in sometimes through the ground-floor windows was lighting up the panel against which the drawing hung. It was no caricature, as I have said already, but a good and suggestive drawing, the work of a young and poor penciller, whose pencil was yet destined to bring him fame and money too. There was no countershock of trivial annoyance and indignation to balance the shock of sad yet sweet surprise which the sight gave him. Yes, it was she! and all unwittingly he had invited under the same roof with him, the continual presentment of the image which must not fill his heart!

Steadily and bravely he faced the portrait, admonishing himself the meanwhile that he must needs school himself henceforth to do so daily.

There was a dreamy distance-searching look in the expression given by the draughtsman. He took good note of that, and brought himself to the recollection that his own life had aspirations and distant longings, not directed into an empty dreamland. He saw the circlet of stars which surrounded her initials, and brought himself to the recollection of distant star-crowns of far other brightness.

Steadily still and bravely did he face her portrait; tenderly and truly did he bless her in his heart, yet as one who parts company resolutely in uttering saluta-

tion. "Yes, it is she!" He, indeed, unwittingly had invited her pictured presence; now it came into mind that not he but another had brought it and set it up there. "By will and deed of that other himself alone, or else by hers? With her knowledge and consent, or merely by decree of his own fancy and affection, to indulge which were, in *his* case—his happier case? No! that shall not be said—but, in *his* case, neither wrong nor foolish, try the act by what standard you shall please?"

Questions these which probe to the quick. If a bitter drop be within his heart's core it shall out through so deep a puncture.

Oh noble heart! There came forth indeed a gushing of its inner sap; but generous and rich and of a sweetness exquisite. "Be this man her appointed love or not, one only striving, by the Lord's help, shall be mine: to make him worthier of her, or worthier to bear the pang of losing such as she."

It is almost incredible how the resolution thus taken braced his mind. Little by little it wrought this effect, that, instead of having need to summon courage when he must encounter the picture, he could find encouragement by letting his look rest on it. It was a consolation to see there a pledge that all the strong affection she had unconsciously won from him was not to have been won in vain—was not to have pressed into his life merely as somewhat to be sternly thrust out again. It was joy—one of those pure joys born of sorrow—to hope that he might do something for her, whereat she, too, though unwitting of his share in it, should have good reason to rejoice.

And so he turned him to his daily work again, allowing only by degrees the more tender brotherliness of feeling wherewith he had new-adopted Mark to show itself.

For a long time no word of Clara passed between the two, nor so much as one significant look. Mark had no conception that Ingram had ever taken in her any surpassing interest, and was far too little hopeful of his own case, too sensitive of it, and too reserved, to allow himself, in the most confidential mood, to make any allusion to the matter. This, indeed, put no constraint upon him other than would have been on him elsewhere and in other company. But Ingram, though he neither wished nor cared otherwise to have any precise explanation with Mark about her, felt it irksome to avoid studiously all mention of her name. He therefore nerved himself one day to say to Mark, as he himself stood by the mantelpiece and looked up at the picture,—"Was Miss Jerningham in Venice still when you came away?"

"Oh, no!" answered the other, "she was in Florence; and it seemed as if she were never coming from it."

"Did time seem so very long to you, then, whilst she was away?" pursued the curate, turning round and facing him. "It can't have been so many months, after all."

"So many months? Why! one month seemed" .... and Mark broke off, blushing red to the roots of his hair —first with the mere shyness of surprise, next with a rising glow of indignation, as of one resenting that he has been betrayed to show more of what he feels

within than, unsurprised, he would have willingly made known.

There was, undoubtedly, a smile upon the features of his friend, as his quick and almost angry glance sought to read them; but a smile so strange, so sad, so sweet; it was impossible to do the man on whose countenance it lingered the injustice to suppose that he was exulting in the success of an impertinent intrusion.

Mark looked at him long and fixedly; but in the face of that strange smile could fasten no quarrel on him had he wished it. At last he looked off from his countenance to the portrait, and said:—

"Was it that set you questioning?"

He nodded assent.

"It was given me, and I was charged to set it up in the brightest place wherever I should be, else I should not have hung it there."

Not one word said the other; but, saving he should have shut his eyes, no effort could have prevented the plain if mute inquiry which they spoke.

"Oh no! not that, not that!" Mark answered, as by irresistible impulse, the voiceless question—"No, Rosina gave it me, and packed it with her own hands before I came away, and bid me hang it in the brightest spot in any room I might have at home in England."

"Rosina?" said Ingram, now himself surprised almost as much as Mark had been. "Rosina?" And he looked, as he was, utterly at a loss to read the riddle of this new name brought into the conversation. Clara was the name of which he had wished to render naming easier between them, and here had come out another entirely unknown. "Rosina?" Who could

she be? What to Mark? And why the giver of such gift to him? Brandling himself felt that he had said too much not to say more.

"I thought you must have known Rosina: she was the daughter of the good people whose rooms I lodged in at that old palazzo, down by the farther end of the canal, in Venice. You must have seen Rosina sometimes: she was a dressmaker, and often at Miss Jerningham's. Well, now I think of it, I know you must have seen her. Do you remember that last evening you walked with us on the Lido, before you left, with cousin Martha, and the old Maestro, and all?"

Did he remember it? Ah, Mark! what ignorant cruelty in the question. If his questioning of you just now were matter to crave pardon for, you should have been down next moment on your knees for his forgiveness after uttering your question in its turn. But he winced not, nor turned pale; he smiled again, and answered with perfect simplicity—

"I remember that last walk on the Lido very well."

"Do you remember, just before you left us, coming to a ring of dancers, and a young girl with a tambourine, whose partner was a water-carrier lad?"

"I think that I remember dancers, but none particularly."

"Ah, well! I thought you might have noticed those two, for they nodded and spoke with some of us; but, anyhow, the girl was this Rosina; and Tonietto, that made a cut with his knife at me, was the water-carrier."

"Made a cut with his knife at you, my dear Brandling! what can you mean? every sentence you speak starts a new riddle."

"Why, this Tonietto was and is Rosina's 'promesso,' as they say there; he took it into his foolish head that I was too fond of her, silly fellow;—the truth being simply this: I was and am as fond of her as any man must be of a dear good girl who helped her mother to nurse him, in a long sickness, in a strange country. I had a lingering fever before I came away, and those kind souls nursed me as if I had been son or brother. I can hardly mind my mother; and, worse luck, never had a sister to care for."

"And Rosina, you say, gave you the drawing here?"

"Yes. Not long before I left, when I was just getting about again, after the fever. She bought it for me, and had it framed, and hung it up in my room, one afternoon; because she guessed—I mean, she knew, —because"—and Mark's face again flushed as he stammered over the words, which would not come, or could not be spoken when they did.

"Mark Brandling," said the curate, with a return of that same strange smile—and he laid his two hands gently upon the young man's powerful shoulders, sending with that light touch a peculiar thrill even through the firmly-knit frame of the working man—"Mark Brandling, there is no sort of need for you to tell me what Rosina had found out when it came into her sisterly mind to make you such a present as that over the mantelpiece. She had found out what I found out also, soon after we first made acquaintance at the little inn by that blue lake in Italy. Now listen to me. It was not from any idle curiosity that I began to-day to press you with a question which you were for a few minutes ready to resent. No! don't shake your head: I saw the red spot

on your cheeks, and the glow in your eyes, and the breath kept in by the firm-set lips. But again I tell you I put no question for idle curiosity—what need to ask about what I knew very well? What I thought was just this: you and I live here in closest intimacy, like college friends, or more brotherly still; and I could not tell whether it were a grief to you, speaking, as we do freely, on the deepest thoughts and feelings, to keep your lips always closed on this one matter. Your secret being none to me, I thought it better to let you know that it was none. You can do freely now—speak or be silent; name the name or avoid it; and count either way on full sympathy from me."

With this he drew both hands, soothingly, down along Mark's arms, and was about to take his hands into his own, when the other forestalled him, and seizing them on the descent, held them as in a vice apiece. The red spot truly was in Mark's cheek again, his lips compressed more firmly than before; but the glow in his great eyes of grey waxed dimmer and dimmer, for a mist gathered in them and condensed into a full glistening drop in either, and there was only just time for him to loose his hold suddenly, to turn upon his heel, and to stride out of the room, before it should come rolling out and over his cheeks. He had no notion, that stout and manful mechanic, of letting even that brotherly parson see him cry.

But I keep calling him yet by such names as some may fancy did better befit him formerly, before Lord Windlesham's devices and the favourable judgment of the firm had given him his unexpected promotion. To the title of working man, indeed, he was far

from having lost his claim. Jealous as they may have justly been of that noble name, not one of the workers in Newton Forge could have disputed his fair claim to it.

Nor indeed could any with decency have demurred to Ingram's claiming the same honourable appellation; for both young men, in their higher and lower walk, were manifestly "fervent in business, serving the Lord." Engineer's and parson's work are, doubtless, different in kind and in degree of nobleness; but both were manfully and nobly wrought by them, each in that state of life to which the Master of all had called him. But I still call Mark by the names of craftsman and mechanic, for special and valid reasons. So far was he from being ashamed of that handwork which had been his so recently, that he was careful to keep his hand in practice and training upon work of the finer and more skilful mechanical sort. In so doing he had come apparently upon the traces of a discovery of that precise kind, which it belongs only to men of manual no less than of theoretical accomplishment to make, to appreciate, and to carry at last to successful issue. He was not yet fully certain of the worth and practical bearing of his idea and process, but worked assiduously and patiently in his spare hours at the attempt to realize them.

He made and remade models; altered and modified them, with an ingenuity and a perseverance which Ingram, who had no spark of mechanical genius, was utterly at a loss to understand.

One thing, however, he understood well enough, that when this labour and contrivance were added to Mark's

work for his employers, and to the reading from which he would not wholly desist, the strain upon his powers must be very great. He was, therefore, loth to accept Mark's proffered services, not only in the classes of the Mechanics' Institute, but in those of the Sunday-school. Yet no remonstrance could prevent the indefatigable worker from taking what share he might in both.

Mark's presence in the Sunday-school was a circumstance significant of the change which had by various ways been wrought in him, through contact with the young Oxford clergyman—always in subordination to that deeper inward Power which works change in men for wisdom and for good.

I cannot say that he was less ardent in his affection for popular rights and liberties than on the afternoon when, under the olive trees, he had paced to and fro, in vehement excitement, after reading intelligence of popular commotions in England, in the newspaper lent him by the Oxonian. No conceivable argument could have persuaded him that exclusion from full civil rights was other than a badge of degradation to the great and, in so many respects, admirable class to which himself belonged. But the heat and fierceness of his prejudices had been abated wonderfully by his closer acquaintance with those whom, as members of another social class, he had hitherto, with manifest injustice, considered in a political sense the active enemies of his own. Of those prejudices, of their heat and of their fierceness, he had become not a little ashamed; and he had learnt to recognise in such sincerity as he had never done before, of how great power is the action of charity

to level those false and cruel barriers which in social and political matters fence off classes from one another, to so great detriment of all. It was not Ingram's teaching, as can be readily surmised, so much as his whole genuine life which taught the craftsman this. Once, indeed, he did speak, half-jestingly, to Mark on this wise:—"You Chartist gentlemen, after all, my good fellow, don't work towards universal enfranchisement at half the rate we minions of ecclesiastical tyranny are doing. I can't say I trouble my head much about household suffrage, manhood suffrage, or any suffrage system whatsoever; but I know one thing, that if we can only get our schools to do their work thoroughly, there won't be a question, after a generation or two, whether the masses are fit for votes or no. I don't believe in Utopias of one kind or another here on earth. I am a clergyman, bound too closely to the saddening duty of reminding men of the mischief in themselves, for that. But class for class, and taking men as the run of them is in all classes, I think my senior boys here in the National, are likely to turn out as fit citizens as any ten-pound household will produce! And 'pon my word, Mark, it will be a little hard, if, after all the time and trouble I've spent upon the future stokers and spindlers of this interesting suburb, they shall turn round upon me to say that the parsonocracy are in league with half a dozen other 'ocracies,' to keep them down morally and intellectually, which I believe was one of your dogmas in Venice, you Radical, engineering blacksmith."

Mark turned almost as red as upon that other occasion of his blushing; for he remembered, to his

confusion, having made some sally of the kind upon some occasion in Italy. Nevertheless he rallied after a bit, and retorted:

"I never said such nonsense, I know, till it was jerked out of me one day by some assertion of Mr. Trelawney, your Cornish friend, that Chartist and cut-throat were all one."

"By the way," said Ingram, "did you ever chance to see at Venice Mr. Vantini's eldest daughter, Beatrice? You remember how severely Trelawney was hurt in getting her out of the theatre that night of the fire? Well, I had a letter from Master Charlie this morning, to say that their marriage is settled to take place in a month or so, not at Venice, but down at the Trelawneys' own place in Cornwall. He demands of me to be ready, upon further summons, to go down there and make man and wife of them."

So passed off the political conversation.

But passing off it did not pass out of Mark's mind, who turned over therein the words of his friend the curate, and came to the conclusion, that there was more depth and truth of meaning in them than perhaps he had intended in their utterance.

At any rate, they led him, as he followed out the hint contained, on to higher and holier ground than that of political or mere social considerations; and from that time dated his determination to take, if Ingram would let him, a part in the work of the parochial Sunday-school.

He was beginning to grow too modest-minded to think himself fit for any prominent place in such an unaccustomed undertaking; and had, as we know, a special

tenderness for children. Therefore he took a class of younger ones.

Now Utopia, as Ingram had truly said, cannot be found here below; but it was surely like a glimpse into that far-off land of good, to see that man of strong arm, skilful hand, cunning brain, ardent conviction, passionate heart, seated with his twelve or fourteen urchins round him, on a Sunday afternoon, trying to win their attention to some simple yet profound parable of the Word that is truly Divine.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROTHER AND SISTER. FRIENDLY SURMISINGS.

THE leafy swordblades of the purple iris top the outlines of great envious walls which hide the landscape round Florence from longing eyes. But it is grand for eyes to see how proudly, in the spring-time, the iris blossom asserts its beauty, even against the liquid blue of heaven.

The noisette rose-buds in festooning thousands come tumbling over those envious walls, to console for—or to tantalise with—the hidden beauties of the gardens they shut out. But even of wall-building there comes an end at last, and from some open slope is gained the wished-for view.

Blue-green underfoot spring the forward shafts of wheat, and rich red-brown spreads the fruitful soil. The vineleaf is scarce out, the long lithe fingers of the vineboughs still look bare, feeling their way from tree to tree, as if in search of places where to pin up favourite clusters by-and-by. On other fruit-trees there is just enough bright leafage to set off pink and white nosegays of blossom, spring-time's lovely promises to autumn, hung in mid-air over all. On the surrounding

mountains, a gossamer film of green floats over the winter-dulled surface of herbage and of mountain shrubs: the very rock seems to smile through that delicate veil of young grassy life. Lower down, on rounded hill-tops, gleam in the sunshine grey monasteries or gay white villas, perched to catch the earliest kisses of the glad warm light. There grow the ilex and the poet's bay; there the needles of the pine interweave with golden rays into one soft velvet woof. The solemn array of cypresses, pointing heavenwards with tapering cones, comes stately down the hill. The olives rise up to meet them, and their highest sprigs dot, as with silver tears, the dark funereal foliage.

Taper as any cypress, springs up the tower of the Signoria, stronghold and audience-chamber of the popular majesty in the old days of freedom. Jewelled and gay, with its variegated marbles, like the leafy blossom garlands of the peach and almond, rises Giotto's enamelled tower. Hard by, the noble cupola of Brunelleschi, great master-builder, whose genius solved the problem of ancient Rome's Pantheon, antedating the hour when Michael Angelo should poise in mid air the huge dome of St. Peter's. Grand palaces, sombre and stately, whose ponderous cornices are very battlements, stand by the side of tall pert modern buildings, with open "loggie" and wide windows in long rows, whose green blinds are not yet folded to keep out the summer sun. The bridges cut up into separate mirrors, where these flaunting beauties may count their storied balconies, the flowing of mountain-born Arno. There is the Ponte Vecchio, to represent the days long gone, a street with merchant stalls and houses spanning the river, scarcely

seen by those who cross its flow. There stands, statue-guarded, on disproportionate piers, the bridge of flattened arches which Grand Duke Cosmo built. There, lower down, and far away, the science of the latter day has hung across the flood, in single span, the path which iron spider-webs support. Farther away sweeps down stream the curving avenue of the dairy-park, the famed Cascine. We cannot see from here how the emerald of its meadows is dight with king-cups and daisies, nor how the violet and primrose nestle, in mossy places, under the stems of its tall trees. But we can trace yet for miles, far away beyond San Donnino, the windings of the river in the plain, until its gleaming mingles with the dwindling outline of the grey-blue hills, and dies on the distant horizon. Firenze la bella! Florence the beautiful! No mortal man may quarrel with the name!

Only think of Pia, looking down upon this view from the lofty rock of Fiesole, one noon when every breeze was hushed upon the lower ridges of the Apennines! It seemed little short of a miracle, spite of the precocious summery softness of the day.

For years she had not been so far off from her sick-room, nor so high up above it. This was Orazio's doing: one of his enthusiastic, strong-willed, but tender freaks of fancy. He was quite positive and certain, that, let the doctor say what he would, the birth of the spring season in Val d'Arno, seen from the height of Fiesole, was precisely that special prescription which was to do Pia incalculable good. He watched weathercocks and read off barometers, and kept thermometers with wet bulb and with dry, till one might have thought him a sworn member of the Meteorological Society. He likewise

planned wondrous contrivances for easy lying at full length in the barouche with cushions and pillows disposed in marvellous array.

Finally, one lovely noon, he lifted Pia tenderly and craftily as a mother a nursing child, carried her down stairs, laid her upon the soft bed in the carriage, and covered her with delicate shawls and wraps; placed Clara beside her, and himself clambered on the coach-box, to sit beside the driver, and watch his driving with jealous care. So they drove out to Fiesole.

It was but some three weeks since he had returned; and as he looked down upon the city,—which, little wonder, its sons love so well,—it pained him to think how soon, perhaps, he must be leaving it, and what uncertainty there might be of ever returning again. His great, lustrous, deep-hearted eyes, so like to Pia's, seemed to let each feature of the dear landscape sink and settle into them. Then they turned to look on her, hoping that she too was intent upon the panorama spread underneath. But it was not so. Nor could he summon back into them a glad light fast enough to cheat her from perception of the wistful melancholy with which he bent their gaze on her. She said nothing; but her heart misgave her that something other than his loving pity for her long infirmity, looked out upon her thence so meaningly. Before a stranger to him, though so fast a friend of hers, it was impossible to make inquiry; all she did was to kiss her own hand, and touch his cheek with it as he stood with his back to the carriage door, his arms folded on his breast.

By-and-by as they came gently down hill, a gorgeous iris caught her eye.

"See how beautiful and proud, Orazio! these must be the 'gigli,' the true lilies of our Florence, let heralds or botanists gainsay it as they may!"

"Ecco cara sorella! Take it, Pia mine," said her brother, who had sprung nimbly to the wall top from a broken mass of stone close by—"take it, dearest, and look at the purple and gold of the imperial flower."

"Ah! but, Orazio, dearest, what is that stain of blood? Is there not a rill of it beginning to trickle on your finger?"

"Only the leaf's sharp set edge, carina, cut my finger as I picked the flower."

"Swordblades, sharpset, round the proud and beautiful iris of Florence? That is something ominous, Orazio! I am sorry you meddled with the flower at all."

"Ominous! dear silly Pia; ominous of what?"

"Brother, brother! You know well what I mean. You have made your blood flow, and have only broken a Florentine lily from its stem. Come here, and let me tie my handkerchief tight round the bleeding finger."

As she leant over the carriage side to do so, she whispered in his ear—"What was the sad look you gave me on the height up there, when you turned from the gay landscape to my poor pale face?"

"Silly Pia, what should make me sad? except to see the dear face pale where blush-roses should come in spring-time." But Pia shook her head, dissatisfied, and answered,—"What so sad as blood-drops spilt in vain?"

"Miss Clara," said Orazio, turning round, and now looking down gaily upon both girls from the coach-box, "your good friend Pia has a doleful freak. You must

have been playing vaporous German music to her. Ah fuori I Tedeschi! Out with the misty, barbarous Germans! You shall sing something 'con brio,' to us this evening; some bravura from Donizetti; or, rattling morceau from Verdi, or if we must have something northern from a Tramontana, such as you, give us, to-night, the grand Scotch war song—'Scots wha hae.' It will be highly appropriate to the calamitous incident of my cut finger."

They met the Viscount, coming out on horseback, as they neared the town gate, who rather scowled than otherwise at Orazio on the box; but bowed low to the two young ladies. Farther on they met the Maestro and Cousin Martha walking amicably arm in arm.

The scowl which had settled on Lord Windlesham's handsome countenance, as the carriage of the Dei Guari passed him, deepened as he rode on. He bethought him that he had gained nothing, of late, in his scheme of growing intimate with Miss Jerningham, and necessary to her. Her friendship with Pia had interrupted, and brought to nothing, the alliance likely to have been cemented between her and him, on her first introduction into Florentine society. Her spare evenings were less and less frequently spent elsewhere than at her friend's house. When she did go out, the Countess was generally with her; several times, of late, Orazio had accompanied them. His presence at home had been desired by the Viscount in the earlier days of Clara's acquaintance with the invalid, as it had seemed feasible to gain a more familiar footing at the Palazzo Dei Guari, by cultivating relations with its heir. But when he came, the young head of that ancient house was rarely to be met with at

the usual resorts of young men of his age in Florence. At the Jockey Club he was never seen; at the Café Donay very rarely. He seldom rode in the Cascine, and, when he did, almost invariably in its least frequented avenues. Once or twice only, when Clara sung, the Viscount had seen him in the family box at the theatre. It struck him that, perhaps, Orazio, who passed for a man of accomplishments, might be found at work in the Uffizi galleries, or in the picture rooms of the Pitti; but he sought for him there in vain; neither was he more successful in his search for him in the studios of distinguished sculptors. This scheme, therefore, must needs be foregone. But the ill-success of it set Windlesham to think more closely of what he had proposed to himself, in endeavouring to isolate Clara and to engross her intimacy. Small was the satisfaction to be derived from the reflection. The notion that Miss Jerningham could be trifled with, if such evil thought had ever dared to shape itself into a wish, was too preposterous for so clearsighted a man to entertain. The notion, that he himself should own her supremacy and consent to sue her as an honourable lover, did not approve itself to him on deliberation: pretty sure token that such victorious and dear supremacy had never in fact been established at all.

Selfishness was the ruling motive of the young man's character, and he was too graceless to be ashamed of its dominion over him. Yet it was humiliating to feel that he had acted, ever since his first acquaintance with Clara, upon petty selfish impulses; and had done at their bidding what made him little in his own eyes, without the justification of having thereby compassed some object of surpassing importance and interest to self. The seat

in parliament for his native county was forfeited; and in spite of the nonchalance wherewith, in writing to his father, he had thought fit to treat the matter, his ambition had been secretly set on it beforehand. His light-hearted rejection of repentance upon first intelligence of the election of another had been oozing gradually away since his intercourse with Clara had begun to be less familiar. He would frequently catch himself asking of his own mind, "Was this sacrifice worth while?" But pride and obstinacy forbad retreat, as yet, from his false position. He staid on, therefore, in Florence, agreeable to the Maestro, not disagreeable to Clara, detested by the thorough-going Cousin Martha, and an object of supreme indifference to Count Orazio Dei Guari, who was not even aware that his lordship had condescended to scowl as he rode past, with his trim-belted groom on the showy thoroughbred behind.

Indeed, if the Viscount reckoned Orazio among those, who, like Ingram or Mark Brandling, would fall under Clara's sway, his imagination misled him strangely. Poor Orazio! His heart was given to an image, that some call a vain delusion, and no more; an image of mingled beauty and deformity,—not unlike to a sculptured Medusa's head, grown into fantastic life under a gifted chisel. Pensive, winsome, life-like, ghastly withal: vipers' heads among soft silken tresses, trailing snakes upon a soft white throat. Ah, poor Orazio! His heart was given where many noble hearts have been bestowed: hearts which a pure flame has consumed, among forked tongues of unholy fire round about. Clara's broad forehead of white, her deep eyes of blue, her soft brown braids of hair, which Pia had parted with gentle bold-

ness, that first night that she knelt by her sick bed; these could not move his fancy, nor win his heart to woo. She had for him but two points of interest: she was his dearest Pia's friend, and she was daughter of an Italian mother. Poor Orazio's love—who does not understand?—was Italy.

Dark and ugly be for the more part the by-paths of secret associations and revolutionary conspiracies. Addled eggs for the more part, be the plans sought thus to be hatched out of the light of day. If any of them come to breaking of the shell, there is more likelihood of creatures to crawl, than of honest chicken to grow into lusty chanticleers.

Pia felt this. In patriotic enthusiasm she did not yield the palm to her brother; nor were her longing hopes and eager desires for revival of national life and political dignity in their dear Italy, less genuine or less lively than his own. But there was in her—she had been schooled to it, no doubt, by the long and painful discipline of her disease—a more trustful, patient, long-suffering spirit of hope, than beat in the feverish pulse of her brother. Happy had it been for him had he lent a more willing ear to her remonstrances. These began from the first moment when she suspected him of being drawn aside into the councils of a secret association. He had lived upon such open terms with her since boyhood; she had shared so fully his honest indignation, his glowing aspiration for some better day; their common convictions had been so truly born twins, so truly nurtured at the same breasts of study and reflection; that when Orazio began to wander, whither she neither could nor would follow him, it was impossible to conceal

from her that their paths, united hitherto, were henceforth diverging.

"But, Pia, dearest, after all, it is the mere word 'secret' which is your bugbear. As for 'association,' you do not think I can free Tuscany, much less Italy, by myself alone? What but association can either establish liberty at first, or maintain her sway when once established?"

"Association! yes, Carino—the acknowledged brotherhood, of those whose throb of brain and heart-beat are in unison. Association! yes, cemented by the binding power of honest and true sympathies. Association, grounded upon mutual knowledge of unstained faith and of unshaken constancy. Oh, yes! in such association—made in the face of day, with those whose worth and manliness you know, and who knows yours—join, and despise the danger! Not one weak word from me shall keep you back."

"Well, but, sorella mia, when you say 'made in the face of day,' do you mean that we are bound in a wrestling-match to forewarn our antagonist by what throw we shall put him on his back? Do you mean to say that in face of adversaries, numerous, powerful, and subtle, we are to act in open-mouthed disregard of prudence and caution?"

"Do *you* think, Orazio," she said, with a searching light in her great eyes, "I *should* be likely to mean any such nonsense?"

"What can you mean, then, by objecting to our associations—that they are *secret?*"

"Surely secrecies may be of different kinds. I object, Orazio, to confederacy with you know not whom. Tell

me, is it not a rule, a law, a necessity of every such organization, that the members must know but few fellow-members?"

Orazio admitted that so it was.

"Well, then, Orazio, how can I bear to think that you, whose aim and end I know to be, like your own self, so noble and so true—should bind yourself to men of whose aims and ends, as of whose motives and characters, you must remain in ignorance—men who may be so ignoble, so unworthy of fellowship in work and suffering with yourself?"

"Why, Pia," he answered, with a smile, "do you suppose that I, or any man, could ever act if we persisted in demanding that none should act with us who could not put themselves, or be put by their sisters, upon the same lofty level? Supposing some self-created opportunity, such as you dream of, dearest, should present itself for public action, and a popular movement; could one reckon, think you, upon the nobleness, and worth, and truth of each man's aim, motive, and character, whose help should speed the good work's triumph?"

"Certainly not; but this you would be sure of—that such help, though given unworthily, was given to the worthy cause, and to its worthy furtherance.

"And then, again—do you not abdicate your independence? Not your mere self-will, but your own inner judgment of right or wrong, by thus affiliating yourself to a body, of which the head is veiled, and the separate members muffled?"

"What, Pia! do you think me capable of acting against conscience, because I may consent, for discipline

and security, to forego somewhat of my free judgment? I neither rate my conscientiousness so low, nor my power of judgment so high, dear sister, as you seem to do," said Orazio, with an approach to bitterness.

"Carino! Carissimo!" returned Pia, with a tone of entreaty and caress; "I do not wish to overrate your judgment, nor to underrate your conscientiousness. But to surrender, not the *right*, the *duty* of judgment, under a dark oath, seems to my poor womanly mind—don't take it amiss, Orazio,—to lay a double trap-fall on the narrow path of conscience. Besides, in secret organizations, there must be another danger. You would not know your leaders, but they would know you."

"Well, Pia, what of that?"

"Why this? when act or word should need the generous and great of heart, then you would be put forward. Where should they find such another for such a need? But for what is treacherous, mean, cowardly, infamous—for the stroke of an assassin's knife to stab Liberty more cruelly than the oppressor's heart—for nameless, hideous deeds, Orazio, will not secret associations find also miserable and willing tools? Think of the degradation of being fosterer, even unwittingly, of such atrocities!"

"Ah, but, Pia," said he, not, perhaps, without a shudder; "I cannot open, even to you, what little I may know of our association; but, believe me, unless I had satisfied myself there were sufficient guarantees of fairness and humanity"——

"Sufficient, Orazio; how can they be sufficient? Not only there is a secret for you to keep from others, but there is a secret also for others to keep from you. What

can be guarantee sufficient that such secret is not fou instead of fair? Think only what the just and glorious cause of Freedom has suffered from the follies of some that would have served it. 'Oppression makes *wise* men mad.' Now, you are not mad, Orazio, at least you never were till now. To say nothing of possible criminals—I cannot bear to think of your acting in the dark with possible madmen.

"Then, Orazio mio, there is another thought which seems to suffocate me when I think upon these dark conspiracies. There is an atmosphere breathed underground in them which quickens what is traitorous in man. All history witnesses that their secrets are ill kept, and that the baser sell the nobler."

"Oh Pia! it is not like you to scare me back by selfish fear."

"I think," said Pia, slowly, as if answering a searching question put by her own heart: "I think I could bear to see you fall in open fight, under my own eyes, Orazio. I think if no fight were, and you were held to answer for an honest open agitation, I could sit by and hear your trial to the end. I think if tyranny should condemn you so to die, I could find strength to smile consolation, at the scaffold. But to think of your being snared, and sold, by traitors, after such fashion, that the enemy might justly treat you as vermin in a trap,—that is intolerable."

The only result of such conversations had been that Orazio would neither open any such discussion with nor his sister, carry any on which she should attempt to open. She still held the threads through the labyrinth of his heart; but across one avenue was an iron railing and a gate, fast locked. This will explain the mingled

reserve and confidence between the brother and sister, Orazio's silence and Pia's half inquiries, and the painful impression made upon her by the trivial incident of the gathered iris, with its sharp leaf blade, on the descent from Fiesole.

No harm came to her from that venturous expedition; the success of it delighted Orazio, and emboldened her. She would drive out with him and Clara, most days, taking a few turns in the Cascine when she felt unequal to a more distant drive. On afternoons of choicest temperature, the carriage would stop to let her enjoy the music of the military band. Matters began to look brighter for the Viscount, who would rein up alongside and enter into conversation. He was careful to show much attention to Pia, who encouraged him, being anxious, for a reason of her own, to study him. Indeed she directed Orazio to ask him several times to the Palazzo, and on two or three occasions was herself enabled to be upon the sofa in the drawing-room, and to engage him in close conversation. On the morrow of one such evening, she asked, abruptly, of Clara, who had been playing and singing in a dreamy desultory manner, in her room,

"For what is young Lord Windlesham in Italy, Carina?"

There was no confusion on Clara's countenance as she wheeled round the music-stool and looked at her; but there was much astonishment. She had never put the question in any shape to herself.

"For what is young Lord Windlesham in Italy, my dear? I have no notion. There are always young English lords in Italy, are there not?"

"Perhaps there are; but as passing tourists, most times. Did you not say he came to Venice with four or five others from the same university?"

"Yes, there were four when I first made acquaintance with them there at the Vantini's."

"The others are all gone home, long since, I think?"

"Let me see, before I say yes or no. Mr. Trelawney, who got so much hurt at the theatre, went home at last, with his parents, and a nice bright little sister who came out with them. They took away Beatrice Vantini, I think I told you, did I not? I hear she is to be married soon in Cornwall, at the Trelawney's. Mr. Digby——"

"That's the good natured Hercules who rowed the gondola?" inquired Pia.

"Just so. Well, he went to Corfu, and has gone since then, like Ulysses, striding over the world in search of adventure; so Lord Windlesham told me some time back."

"Eccone due! two disposed of," and Pia checked them off on her thin fingers; "the third?"

"Mr. Ingram went home to Oxford, I believe, or Cambridge; I don't well remember which."

Did the poor curate, at home in England, in the sunless suburb, feel such a shiver as they say men feel when a foot treads where their grave shall be? Would it have sent a pang through his heart to hear her speak with such complete unconsciousness of all that his return "to Oxford or to Cambridge, she could not tell which,"—had cost him? Or would he have smiled serenely, counting it help to his resolution that what it had decreed to kill and bury should thus be seen to have no kind of life in any thought of hers?

"Three, then, went home, or at least away. One stayed; this same young lord. All these months he has spent in the two cities in which you have been. He was at Venice till just before you came here, was he not? And now he stays at Florence whilst you stay. Do not be vexed with me, dearest; but let me ask again, for what is this young lord in Italy?"

At this pointed repetition of her question it was scarcely possible for Clara to misunderstand her. She coloured a little, and said, in the firmest, quietest voice,

"You have said too much or too little. Let me hear all that is in your mind. You have given me the right to demand it thus."

"Come here, then, Clara; here, close by my side as I lie."

She put the wan hands together, and irresistible invitation pleaded out of her eyes.

"Come here and sit down, or kneel down, by me, as you did that first night when you came in to gladden me with your grand beaming countenance. Let me put my hands under your braids again and hold your head between them." Clara humoured the fancy of her friend. "Now tell me, is the young lord here for *you?*"

"Tell *me* first, then, Pia, what prompted you to ask this strange question with such suddenness?"

"One great reason, first of all. It has just struck me that if there be ought between you, I have been selfish, and have parted you."

"Dear, kind Pia," said the English girl, shaking her own head loose, and passing her arm round the other's neck to kiss her; "thank you for so kind a thought, though it seems strange. What can have made you

fancy there was anything between me and Lord Windlesham?" She smiled so cheery a smile, so genuine and so free in its denial that Pia perceived at once her surmise was incorrect.

"Why, when first you came to Florence, and I heard of you with an interest which seized on me, I knew not how, I was told, among other things, in answer to my inquiries, that this Lord Windlesham was often with you in society. And when Orazio set on foot those drives in the Cascine, I saw at once that something in our carriage had an attraction for the handsome horseman which I knew my pale face could never have. I encouraged him, and saw how eagerly he took encouragement, although he veiled that eagerness, or sought to veil it, under his quiet nonchalance."

"Plotting Pia! plotting so secretly that not one faint suspicion crossed my mind of what was at work in yours."

"I meant no plot, Carina, but only to discover if I had done you wrong, and could right it. You have given me so much of your time and company, and with them such rich and varied pleasure, that I felt disturbed to think that what was given me was perhaps robbed from you."

"Robbed from me? from the young lord, you mean, on your own theory,—unless you meant to ask whether I were in Italy for him, as well as he for me."

"Robbed from yourself, I repeat. My compunction did not travel beyond a fear of having done you yourself some wrong through selfish engrossing of your company. I suppose I may speak out about Lord

Windlesham without a morsel of danger that I shall hurt you? Answer honestly."

"The only thing which could hurt me, Pia, would be to doubt a word of mine at single utterance."

"Well, it is a relief to me to know that the young lord is without place in your heart, Clara. I cannot bring myself to like him. I should have been more disappointed than I can tell, to have discovered that one was *simpatico* to you, who, to me, was *antipatico*."

"Just now you charged me to be honest, and honest I will be to the uttermost. I have no sort of antipathy to Lord Windlesham, and will not pretend to sympathise with you there."

"Ah, there is too much Englishwoman in you," retorted Pia, "in spite of your half Italian blood, to let you feel the keenness of those unreasonable, real forces of attraction and repulsion. I see your indifference to the young lord is so genuine that it never occurred to you to dissect and study his looks or words as I have done for your sake."

"Pia, your dissections and analysings frighten me. I wonder with what sharp knives of thought you cut into me myself, or into what crucible you put my simplest words and deeds."

"See," said the other, "I lie here in this idle way. 'Tis no great wonder if thoughts and fancies be inquisitive when they chance to gain matter for experiment of life-like interest."

Then she added, after a pause:—

"Remember one thing, Clara, I cannot promise *not* to put your words and ways, at times, in crucibles,—shallow pots enough too frequently,—but this I promise,

you must trust me for it; no fire but fire of love shall heat them."

"What! Never; not even if any one of those irresistible antipathies should seize on you?"

"Don't you talk nonsense, Clara. What can you pretend to know about it, you child of mist? Antipathies, indeed, in matter sympathetic! It shows your hopeless ignorance. But I have not done with our Viscount, about whom I don't want to have to talk again."

"Well, Pia," said Clara, listlessly, turning again towards the piano, and striking a chord; "what more have you to say of him?"

"That it may yet be well for you not to dismiss my question utterly. I do not know how long you may remain in Italy; but it may concern you deeply, after all, to notice whether his remaining depends on yours."

"I think it's my turn now to say 'do not talk nonsense, cara mia.' Alchemists found more dross in their crucibles, most times, than gold, you know. My own opinion is, Lord Windlesham is in Italy for love of music, which, now I think of it, he studies hard with the Maestro. If when the Maestro goes, the Viscount stays in Florence, I can't see why it should not be for admiration of Madamigella dei Guari;—there now!"

And, as she turned her head to dart her parting shot at Pia, the door which faced her opened gently: Orazio, with affected solemnity, came forward, to his sister's couch to say—

"Illustrissimo signor Visconte di Vindelseno, the young English lord, has just been here to do himself the honour, he assured me, of inquiring for the health of

Mademoiselle la Contesse Pia dei Guari, and to express his Lordship's anxious hopes that her appearance in the salon last night has not, in any way, affected it injuriously."

There was no resisting the ludicrous coincidence. Clara went off into an honest fit of laughter, in which it was impossible for Pia not to join her. Orazio looked from one to the other, amazed at the boisterous reception of his announcement. His puzzled looks served only to increase their merriment: as he retreated, he declared that he should leave them until the happy restoration of their lost senses.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TELL-TALE—THE CIVIC CROWN.

CLARA'S visit to Venice was short and apparently uneventful; had the Viscount suspected the brevity of its duration, he would not have committed the error of following in her steps. After the explicit conversation with her friend in Florence, it would have been impossible not to notice his appearance within a few days of her arrival. Pia, moreover, unrelentingly, wrote thus in one of her epistles:—

"Madamigella dei Guari was in the Cascine yesterday; her carriage halted by the band; no horseman reined up by the carriage-door: Orazio says he understands the Signor Visconte is in Venice. I had understood it was the athletic young Englishman, not the milordo, who was so fond of boating in gondolas?"

Clara's indignation was a little moved, as her friend intended. She was annoyed that she should seem to others, if she did not feel herself, persecuted by assiduities which, if meaningless, were liable to misinterpretation; if having purpose, unacceptable. This she let Lord Windlesham discover, his tact requiring but

delicate indications to make him perceive that he had committed a mistake in coming this time to Venice. Cousin Martha's satisfaction at the turn which, from some cause unknown to her, affairs were taking, was unmingled.

One incident, however, occurred during the few weeks they spent there, affecting the fortunes of Mark's kind friend, Rosina. Tonietto was taken by the conscription; he must needs don the white coatee, and blue pantaloons, of the Austrian Emperor's fighting-men. He was to be drafted into some Italian regiment, quartered upon the native plains of those Hungarians who, to be out of harm's way and useful to the Kaiser, were at that time garrisoning Venice. He had chosen to mistrust Rosina in happier days gone by; and now his punishment must be to learn in banishment and absence to trust her wholly, or to let all hope die out of his wild, suspicious heart. He was gone, indeed, before Clara's arrival. Not so long but what she could discover the tears in Rosina's eyes as she came to her dressmaking in the theatre or in Clara's private rooms.

So kind and winning was the English signora's manner, when venturing to ask of the poor girl what ailed her, that Rosina told without reserve her sorrowful story; encouraged by a lurking hope that the lady, whom her friend Marzocco loved, might have special sympathy with such a trouble.

"Dear lady, he is gone, for so long, into a foreign country, poverino! all alone!"

"And is there no help, my poor Rosina?"

"None, I fear; not even money; for we are not sure that they would let us pay some other man, who does

not care about going to the regiment, to take his place. If they would, the little money I had laid by would not be enough, nor ten times as much."

"We must see about finding some one. I will ask M. Vantini to let me know how that may be; it would, perhaps, be easier to help you with money than you imagine."

"What goodness! but I have little hope, signora. I used to be contented and thankful, and seemed to gain more than enough by needlework. But, only think, signora, since they have taken my poor ragazzino I have grown restless and dissatisfied; it is misery to stay where I am. I want to leave dear Venice now poor Tonietto's gone. I should like to go to service; then I could save up all my wages, in case the money should be of use to him. Mother can spare me, for my next sister is growing up; father, who is 'impiegato,'—has a little place in a public office—was advanced a short time ago. They are not unhappy at home, and that makes me feel more lonely there, though I fear it is wrong of me."

Clara gave the sobbing girl what consolation she could; and, according to promise, begged M. Vantini to inquire from some one in authority concerning the chance of a substitute for Tonietto. At Venice they were told the case was not hopeful: but, for ultimate decision, they were referred to head-quarters at Vienna; thither the good-natured banker promised to write, and make application to the authorities through his correspondent. He also told Miss Jerningham that Mark Brandling had left a small sum in his hands for the benefit of the couple so sadly parted.

Madame Vantini, too, became interested in the case.

Upon Clara's mentioning Rosina's wish to leave Venice and enter service, she declared herself able and willing to gratify it. She would take Rosina to England, whither she was at once proceeding, to the marriage of her daughter Beatrice. If Rosina should be found expert and handy, it was more than likely that the future Mrs. Charles Trelawney would be glad to have a Venetian girl for her own maid.

Rosina's gratitude, tearful and joyous, was almost unbounded. She seized Clara's hands and covered them with kisses.

"I know the sun never shines, signora, in Inghilterra; but that is not so sad, where there is sunshine in the faces of such as you."

"And tell me, signora mia," she said, as a sudden thought struck her, "is it very big, that Inghilterra? bigger than Venice and the Lido? Does one meet one's friends there, for certain, as one does here? Only think, I should see the good Marzocco! What a consolation! Oh, how glad the bimbi will be to hear of him!"

"Inghilterra is much bigger, Rosina, than Venice, and the Lido, and Chiozza, and all the Lagune together. I am afraid one might be very long there without meeting, for certain, with a friend. But who is the good Marzocco, and what is he doing there?"

"Oh, dear lady! you know him very well; I have often seen him here with you; when you went away he was as near breaking his heart, I think, as my poor Tonietto when they took him." And half afraid she might have done mischief, she looked up timidly into Clara's countenance.

"You have seen a friend of yours with me, Rosina,

called Marzocco? I don't know any person of the name!"

"Perdona, signora, perdona; I had quite forgotten; he has two names; I never could learn one of them; the first was Marco, like the great saint on the Piazza; but the children called him Marzocco because he played at lions, and roared like the good saint's beast. He is English, too, signora, and makes wonderful griffins, of brass and iron, to spit fire and boiling water, and fly through the clouds, and burrow under ground."

Clara began to comprehend of whom and of what Rosina had been speaking. She called to mind, also, that the banker had told her of the money left by Brandling, and could not doubt his identity with the roaring, griffin-building Marzocco. She would willingly have asked for the whole story of Rosina's acquaintance with him, were it not for what she said about his sorrow at her own departure. There was no need, however, for any questioning; the poor Italian girl, having once spoken out about him, neither could nor would restrain herself. Clara must needs, therefore, to her own disturbance and astonishment, hear all about Rosina's surprisal of Mark's secret; about his despondency and sickness; about his possession of her own portrait; about Tonietto's misdeed, to which Rosina, wringing her hands, attributed the misfortunes which had come upon them; and about the settled sadness with which Brandling had been compelled to leave Venice before her return.

It seemed fated that others should tear to shreds the veil of unconsciousness which had hung before her imagination hitherto. Pia had begun purposely, and,

without purpose or intention, Rosina was completing the work.

There was, however, a difference to herself in the feeling with which she was affected by Pia's and by her humbler friend's disclosure.

For the young nobleman, as she had told Pia, she had never felt antipathy, nor did she now, though vexed at his silent importunity, and wishing simply to be rid of it.

For Mark, she was not sure that she might not entertain a secret sympathy, the lines of which, under influence of the pity which Rosina's account excited, began to reveal themselves in fine though still faint traceries.

On returning to Florence, she found Orazio still at home, Pia, thoroughly enjoying his presence, and the beauty of a summer not yet too warm to be delicious. There must have been some counter-order from the heads of the society to which the young nobleman was affiliated, for he prolonged his stay from week to week, and seemed to have cast off the burden of his anxiety.

But in truth a crisis, unsuspected by him, was at hand. Pia's apprehension of danger from base and treacherous members were to be fully justified: the directors had found reason to apprehend the effects of a close and jealous vigilance with which the police, who now held some threads of their crooked schemes, began to follow their every movement. Perfect inaction was necessarily the order of the day. All their fear was, lest any unexpected event or excitement should, in spite of their authority, precipitate a catastrophe.

Orazio, therefore, stayed happily at home: studied and conversed with Pia, sang with Clara, who was

delighted to have a pleasant companion that really did not care for her but as his sister's friend. He made plans for their "villegiatura" in a little house belonging to the family, within such easy distance, as not to deter Pia by the fatigue of removal. This little villa stood less than three miles from the gates of Florence, under shadow of a high bank topped with pines, screened from the heat by tufts of noble ilex. Attached to it was a long slip of vineyard, fenced off from the road by one of those envious high walls. Between the wall and the vines were a box-edged walk and a border of flowers. Near the end, towards the city, was a door opening inwards from the road, to which Orazio had once had an English patent lock fixed, instead of the common, clumsy, Tuscan bar and bolt. When Clara and Cousin Martha came out to spend the summer there, Orazio gave the former his second key, that she might enjoy full liberty of exit or entry, without need of troubling the portress at the ponderous iron gates which closed the avenue of ilex and olive, leading to the front door. This key Clara fastened to her watch-chain. The walk under the wall was a favourite with her towards sunset; there, in the shade, still grateful at that hour, she could yet enjoy the glow upon the trellised vines, the olives, and the pine-clad rock. A flight of stone steps at one point, led up to a little turret overlooking the road and the landscape beyond. In this little turret she would sit, sometimes, to bethink herself of what Rosina had made known concerning Mark. At other times pacing up and down the walk, in conversation with Orazio, she would be reminded of the craftsman, by the young nobleman's dis-

course on political or social freedom. In this walk the Maestro found her when, coming out one day to spend the evening at the villa, he startled her by saying that he had ill news to give. Dear, goodnatured, old man, he did not suspect that his ill news was no little relief to Clara. It was simply that "a letter had come to-day from Lord Windlesham, thanking him for all his friendliness and his invaluable musical instruction; informing him, with regret, that he should not see him soon again, as he was not returning by Florence, but from Venice meant to visit Innspruck. He wished to see the lake of Constance and the Rhine falls, on his way home,—and so forth."

Pia was on the sofa, in the open loggia facing the flower garden, when Clara came to give her the news. But Orazio had forestalled her, having brought home, as the Florentine gossip of the day, intelligence that the young lord's English horses had left for embarkation at Leghorn.

"What did you do to him at Venice, Carina, that he comes back to us no more? It is rather hard of you to have driven him home, if, as you would have it, he was in Italy for the sake of Madamigella dei Guari. Well, I must console myself as best I can. Buon viaggio, Signor Visconte."

But the turret on the sheltering wall, and the long walk in its shelter, were destined to witness an event of greater influence upon Clara's movements than the departure of Lord Windlesham. The summer months were almost gone; the fire-flies had diminished their flitting thousands, as the corn had been reaped beneath the vines; the drooping clusters had put on deeper

purple. Pia and her friends had not yet thought of returning to the palazzo, nor had the theatre resumed its season.

But some Royal Imperial Grand-ducal fêtes fell out just then, and two or three extra representations were to be given. In these La Jernietta, happily so near Florence, was entreated to take part as "prima." It fell out, likewise, that the police discovered, or invented, a scheme of the secret societies, to profit by the excitement of these festivals for creating a popular commotion. Orazio received a double warning, one, from the heads of his association, bidding him beware of false orders to act, as it had been determined to keep quiet; the other, from an old friend of his father's, a man in office, intimating that his name was unfavourably noted by the police, and that he had better apply for a passport to leave Tuscany before it should be too late. No consideration would have made him follow the advice thus kindly and generously given, had those, under whose orders he had bound himself to face all risk, thought fit to call on him for action. Their communication, of course, he could breathe to no living soul, but he thought himself at liberty to make his sister acquainted with that which advised him to leave home. Were he to determine without her knowing what had influenced him, she would be left a prey to the most agonising conjectures. He, therefore, laid the letter of their father's old friend before her, and, upon her passionate entreaty, consented to be guided by it. A few days before the festivities, he obtained a passport and left for Switzerland.

Clara had no suspicion that this proceeding was

connected with the vague rumours of popular disquiet and discontent which reached them through the Maestro and other visitors, assuming sufficient shape and consistency to console Pia for the loss of her brother's company by the reflection that he was thus withdrawn from reach of real danger.

The feverish expectation, which fills men's minds at such times, was strong upon the inhabitants of the villa. Clara, one evening, had been watching from the turret the glorious death of day. On the highest hill-tops only was any sunlight lingering. The road beneath, up to the high vineyard wall, lay in a lilac twilight, deepening slowly into dark purple grey: the shadow cast by the wall across the gravel walk and far among the vines was gathering intenser gloom. Suddenly the silence was broken by two sharp reports, as of shots fired behind the rounded slope in front of her, beyond the road: then came a cry, as if suppressed with desperate effort: then shouts, as of pursuers. At that moment she saw a figure against the sky, coming rapidly over the swelling ground. As it neared her she could perceive a young man endeavouring, as he ran, to bind his arm up with a handkerchief. There could be no doubt that he was wounded, and very little that he was the object of a pursuit, the shout of which grew nearer and more distinct. He came crashing through a fence of stakes and reeds into the road, but the violent effort seemed to exhaust his strength. He looked right and left along the stretching road and the interminable wall which barred his progress, but saw no place of concealment: he shook his head and sank down on the bank, over which he had just forced his way, as if

in despair of escaping now. There was nothing repulsive about the man to check the impulse which now flushed Clara. Without pausing to deliberate whether she might be giving asylum to some malefactor, she determined on rescue. She ran down the flight of steps and along the wall to the door of which the key hung at her watch-chain; opened it; glided across the road; put one hand on the stranger's arm, and the finger of the other to her lips. He understood at a glance; rose without a word and followed her in at the door, which she closed noiselessly and locked with a double turn. They stood silent, one on either side of the doorway, fearing to move along the garden-walk, lest, in the stillness, their footsteps on the gravel should be heard over the wall. The pursuers, two gendarmes and a police agent out of uniform, were soon up to the opposite hedge, under shelter of which they were convinced that their game had taken refuge. He and Clara could hear them literally beating bushes and parting the thick clumps of cane reed.

"He can't be far gone," said one of the Carabinieri; "I was sorry to fire, but he had got the pace of us, so I thought a bullet was the best persuasion."

"You hit him, Giuseppe, fair enough," answered another voice; "sharp, too, for the fellow squealed."

"That wall there must have stopped him; mustn't it?"

"No fear of that: not one of us could climb it, much less a winged bird hop over it."

"Try the door, though," said a third voice, "that's a door there, near the end of the Dei Guari 'vigna' isn't it?"

Clara and her rescued held their breath in agony, as

the butt-end of the carbine came thump against the door. The blows seemed given against their own breasts as they stood. But the door was of stout seasoned beech, grown on Vallombrosa; and the broad, smooth bar of English steel fitted truly to the brass socket in the solid timber.

"Door, indeed!" quoth the wielder of the carbine, bestowing on it an indignant kick; "Ghiberti's gates at the Battisterio don't shut so tight. Unless he crept through the key-hole he didn't escape this way. And such a key-hole! About as big round as the touch-hole of a carbine."

And he turned away.

"You, Giuseppe," said the third voice, that of the police agent, "take down the road. You can get help and light at the guard house at the gate. If our man has run that way, you will hear of him at the Dogana. Pietro and I will go and turn out the mounted patrol in the borgo, farther up."

When the faintest echoes of their footsteps had completely died away, Clara said, in a whisper:—"What can I do now for you? The house here is not mine. I have no right, I fear, to compromise my friends by offering you its shelter."

"Signorina, one does not thank in words those who save life so. You have done all you can, except to tie this handkerchief tighter round my arm." Clara bound it firmly; took off her own light shawl and made a sling of it.

"You heard the Carabinieri, signora? I shall double on them; they will not suspect it, and I shall get back to friends, who will house me, till I can escape.

'As for you, signora, let me out by the door again, and heaven bless you. I don't ask your name. I know whom to pray for—you are the Jernietta."

The true steel bar, poised by the cunning skill of an English workman, slid back under the gentle leverage of Clara's fingers, and, with a silent nod, the young man passed out, crossed the road, climbed through the hedge, and disappeared.

Clara, considering the secret not her own, feared lest any mention of it might amount to betrayal. She therefore said nothing to Pia or to cousin Martha.

Two nights after came the first of the grand festive operas. The house was illuminated "a giorno," and filled to its outer passages. Royal-Imperial-Grand-ducal personages were in their conspicuous seats. Their reception had been chilly; the public humour was not, just then, extravagantly loyal.

But when Clara first appeared upon the stage, she was greeted with a shout of such wild enthusiasm, as astonished her and startled the authorities. For five or six minutes she found it useless to utter a single note. And this applause was all the more remarkable, as being in breach of the etiquette which prescribes, that the first signal for approval of the artist, on such occasions, should come from "illustrious personages."

Three or four times during the performance did such an outburst greet her. Towards its end, amidst the showers of bouquets that were thrown to her, she picked up one—attracted simply by the exceeding beauty of the flowers—and fastened it into a belt round her waist: the uproar was deafening.

A very shrewd agent of police, in the side scenes, took

notice of what had escaped the observation of Miss Jerningham: the bouquet was adorned with streamers of ribbon, green, white, and red, the Italian tricolor; this peculiarity he brought to the notice of his superiors.

They refused to see in it for this once, anything more than a mere chance; but resolved to watch narrowly the incidents of the next night's representation.

The same jubilant salutation greeted her. The same irrepressible outbursts of some feeling, more personal and deeper than that of mere artistic admiration, interrupted the course of the evening. By-and-by came a significant circumstance. There was a solo by Clara, in which occurred the dangerous words of "patria" and "libertà;" the excitement and enthusiasm reached a climax. Clapping of hands, waving of handkerchiefs, cheers and shouts swelled up and died away, and were caught up again, and repeated, and redoubled, until it seemed that the good folk of Florence had lost all self-control. Clara stood, half frightened, half amused, at a loss to understand the true nature of the triumph she was undergoing rather than enjoying. At last there fell at her feet a thick mass of violets, not thrown from above, but quoit-wise, with skill and care, from the hand of some one in the pit, on a level with the floor of the stage. She saw something gleam among the flowers, and could not resist the impulse to stoop and pick it up. As she did so, the flowery mass fell away, and there was left in her hand a golden garland, in exquisite filagree, figuring an ancient Roman civic crown; upon the burnished golden fillet, interwoven in the foliage, she could decipher the inscription, "Italia, Claræ, ob civem servatum."—"Italy, to Clara, for a citizen saved." Then flashed across her

the conviction that the secret of her adventure in the Vigna dei Guari had become the property of the Florentine people, if not of their rulers.

It was even so. With a rapidity which equals, often, where the popular press is gagged, the instantaneous intelligence conveyed by the organs of a free publicity, the rumour of her generous deed had spread; accompanied by fanciful additions, coloured with false tints, magnified by exaggerations, such as there be few means or none to rectify or to dispel, where there is no free press.

The most foolish and absurd interpretations were put upon an unpremeditated and impulsive act. The police, still in ignorance of the plain facts of the case, could hardly be blamed for sending an intimation to the director of the theatre, that the opera fixed for the third night's festival must be altered, and one substituted in which Miss Jerningham should not sing.

This did not much mend the matter. A storm of hisses and disapprobation, with loud and threatening cries, was substituted for the thundering "ovations" of the preceding nights. The authorities were on the point of bringing the performance to a sudden close several times throughout the evening; which, however, passed over without any serious disturbance.

Pia was, by this time, in possession of the fullest details of an occurrence, which it was now useless and impossible to conceal from her any longer. She judged the case, at once, with her usual good sense.

"Carina," said she, when news was brought of the manner in which Clara's absence had been received by the excited Florentines; "you are, by no fault of yours,

in a false position. The rights or wrongs of us and of our rulers cannot justly be said to affect you. Genuine convictions you can scarcely have; vague sympathies would not justify you, in any interference, which might lead to mischief. I do not see any wholesome influence you could exercise; your continued presence can only be a rallying point for wild passions. It will offend and embarrass the authorities. Though you know my poor opinion of their wisdom, I cannot think you can do aught against them to good purpose. You are the subject of a powerful state, which will protect your person; there is no sort of courage in remaining here, nor any cowardice in retiring of your own free will. Do not wait for the indignity of an injunction to leave Florence. Write at once to the English ambassador for a passport, and start to-morrow. We will send to-night to his private residence, and be sure you explain to him in the letter the urgency of your case."

Clara perceived and admitted the force of this. One only question remained before she wrote. If she left Florence, whither should she go? Cousin Martha undertook to answer that for her.

"We have been a long time in Italy now, Clara dearest. I do so long for a sight of old England again. Sir Jeffrey always says he wants you back at Wymerton; let us go there. Let us go home."

"Home! Carissima! Yes! The good cousin says right, though my heart will be torn by losing you. I love you so, that I cannot bear to think of any home for you, where I am not. But it is good for you to go: very good I am sure for other reasons than this strange

affair. Write then, dear Clara, write! I will say no more till the letter is gone."

When it was so, Clara came and sat by her bedside; for it was late.

"Tell me, Pia dearest," she said, taking one hand in hers, and looking into the great eyes, whose lustre was dim with rising tears; "why did you say just now, that for many reasons it would be good for me to go?"

"Dearest, I have reflected, whilst you sat writing there; and am persuaded that the word was ill-timed. The few hours we have yet to spend together are too short for me to do justice to the thoughts out of which it grew. Do not press me to break a silence which I am resolved to keep. But promise me solemnly, that when any trouble comes upon you, any heart-trouble, I mean—inward, deep, and searching—you will write and ask of me what it was in my mind, to-night, to say."

Clara promised: and Pia with a deprecatory smile—"it is the last time, bright one!"—took her head, in the old fashion, between her hands, and kissed her broad white brow with tender fervour.

Early the next morning came an "*attaché*," with His Excellency's kindest compliments to Miss Jerningham, and his admiration of the good sense and feeling which dictated her course.

Clara thought of Pia on her sick bed, and wished she could have heard herself the minister's appreciation of her judgment.

The passport was there; all had been arranged with the Tuscan authorities; the *attaché* would be happy to send out carriage and post horses, or to make any such

arrangements in Florence, as might suit Miss Jerningham, and save her trouble; she would honour him highly by her commands.

That same afternoon, Clara Jerningham and her Cousin Martha were on their way to England.

Pia's mother sat by her bedside, wisely silent, not endeavouring to stem the flood of the poor girl's sorrow, which had been penned back bravely, till her friend was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAME ALICE'S OAKS. A WARNING.

"A BRANCH line, Sir Jeffrey, through the park property! Precious impudence! What next I wonder?" quoth a great squire of rubicund aspect and athletic frame,—a perfect contrast to the spare, colourless, old bibliophile. His broad back and chest showed power through a loose frieze shooting jacket, with well-worn leather patch on the right shoulder; so did the outline of his massive sinewy legs through stout gaiters.

"Well, what next, I can hardly say; but I should like to have your opinion, gentlemen, on the proposal." Sir Jeffrey looked round upon four or five of his county neighbours, all equipped, unlike himself, for a day's work in the woods.

"Which covert do you take this morning, Squire?"

"Watson was saying Snagsley slopes had not been beaten this year; he thought the birds would want thinning there. Any objection to them this time?"

"Objection! Dear me, no! What sort of objection could there be? The coverts are at your disposal; though I dare say that old fellow, Watson, has his

fancies and freaks, which you must encounter as best you may."

"Well, but, Squire," interposed Mr. Baker, another county magistrate, familiar with every wood in Wymerton, "why not begin by walking up the belt to the left of Alice's Oaks, if we are to shoot the slopes to-day? That would take us methodically through our work, as we left it yesterday; give us the upper ridge on the slopes for this afternoon, and leave the main body of the wood for a whole day to-morrow."

"Ah!" said Sir Jeffrey, "that would suit me famously; I could walk down with you to the Oaks, and show you the line through which they propose to bring the cutting."

"The scoundrels!" roared the Squire, bringing his great fist down upon the breakfast table, till the teacups jumped again, and one clumsy cream jug toppled over. Do you mean to tell me, sir, they dare to talk of bringing their confounded cutting through Alice's Oaks? Why, 'tis murder to touch those trees, as well as plunder to take the land from you!"

"Gently, gently," answered the owner of Wymerton, gathering up with a large tablespoon the cream which his energetic friend had sent streaming over the cloth. "You may try what you can make of your indictment for attempt to murder the Oaks; but as for plunder, it's a case for the grand jury to find 'no bill.' They make handsome offers of compensation."

"I'd compensate 'em," retorted the illogical but inveterate Squire; "I'll tell you what, Wymer, this is your property, not mine; but I've that sort of feeling about it, and about those oaks especially, that if I caught

those surveying scamps, poking about on it with link chain and theodolite, I'd pick 'em up, mathematics and all, and chuck 'em into Wymerton-mere."

"Well, we must hope the meeting won't take place, my good fellow, till you have cooled down a bit, or we shall have you figuring at quarter sessions elsewhere than in your usual place upon the bench. But, come, the morning's wasting, and Watson fretting in the servants' hall. Put on your bonnet, Clara dear, and walk down with us to the Oaks; we will come home together, whilst these gentlemen make war upon the birds in Snagsley."

Clara did as he desired, and away they went; the old baronet leaning upon her arm, gently, confidingly, as a father, beginning to feel the touch of age, might lean upon the arm of his well-grown womanly daughter. Watson, his underkeepers, dogs, and beaters, might be seen edging downwards to the right, making for the belt of which Mr. Baker had spoken.

It was a bright February morning; the mossy grass crisp under foot, white and sparkling. There was a thin crust of ice upon the edges of the mere, and the wild fowl were far out in the open water. Here and there in the deer-park were troughs, placed by Watson's provident care, for the herbage had begun to fail. Round them pressed the stags, too tame to be startled from their feast by the passage of Sir Jeffrey and his guests; their warm breath steaming up against the frosty atmosphere. Great trees, nobly branching, like the antlered heads underneath, stood out upon the close cropped grass, or struggled upwards from thickets of tangled blackberry, and stalky ferns frozen brown. The dull green

of the yews, sprinkled over the upland, set off the diamond traceries of the spiders' webs. The bright bay trees of Tuscany could not vie with the metallic gleam of the great hollies, gay with flaming clusters of red berries. Clara thought upon her poor friend Pia; wished she could look upon this scene of beauty, so new and strange to unaccustomed southern eyes; wished that the blighted Italian girl could feel, as she felt, the tingle of her blood in healthy glow, and the springiness of her step upon the mossy carpet, elastic even above the hard set wintry ground.

She thought of Pia, as she would often do, with liveliest remembrance and warmest affection. She had not yet found occasion to put the promised question. Happy Clara! She felt, indeed, how good it was for her, as Pia had foretold, to be once more at Wymerton, her earliest and, in one sense, only home.

She had spent quiet happy months there since her sudden, stormy, leave-taking of Florence; enjoying rest of mind and body, treated with fatherly kindness by Sir Jeffrey, knitting renewal of affection with good folk that had known her birth, quickening oldest and tenderest remembrances of the two that lay under the churchyard turf—sobering, saddening remembrances, but full of power to lift up and purify the heart. Pia had said right: this was for many reasons good indeed.

Alice's Oaks stood in the choicest of all the choice glades of Wymerton. Tradition said the name came down as heirloom from the pretty daughter of the goldsmith of the Ward of Chepe, in the London of Queen Bess. Nay, that certain of the more venerable trees had been planted by the hand of Harry

Wymer's bride. This much was certain, the huge boles, the knotted, sinewy, outspread of the branches, in no few of them, might seem almost to justify the tale. Without a pang, it were hard to decree that any of their stately company should fall under stroke of axe. There was, however, no time for discussing on the spot the proposal made by the directors of the railway, which threatened to run its snake-like rails right through their time-hallowed array. All Sir Jeffrey did, just then, was to make the sportsmen walk over the line of contemplated onslaught; and soon after parting company, their guns told plainly that they had entered on the belt of wood, with murderous effect on the game which crowded it.

After dinner that evening, the question was mooted afresh. As may be imagined, Squire Chilwood's walk through the glade that morning had by no means conciliated his favour towards the sacrilegious notion of sacrificing a single trunk of its fine trees. The blood in that stout and cheery squire's veins was, for the more part, honest Saxon; had it been of unquestioned Celtic purity, and he the lineal descendant of an unbroken line of Druids, he could scarcely have been less tractable in the matter of the venerable oaks. Had the proposal been to lay rails through the most insignificant of coppices, instead of Alice's choice timber trees, the squire would not have regarded it with favourable eye. "Those nasty, lumbering, rattling, hissing, smoking engines," as he was wont to call them, never looked well, in his opinion, except out of sight, in tunnels, underground. He had kept to post-horses, even for his longer journeys, two or three years after the opening of the main line in his

neighbourhood, and had subscribed to keep the four-horse coach upon the road long after it was plain, to the most unbelieving, that its struggle against the whirring express was vain, and its days of travel numbered.

Sir Jeffrey never sat long after dinner. Never quite long enough for the worthy country gentlemen who beat his well-stocked coverts and sat at his hospitable board. The discussion upon the railway-cutting was yet at its height when they entered the drawing-room. No one seemed to dispute the fairness of the offer made by the directors, to whom the straight way through the Wymerton estate was an object of much importance. Compensation had been offered in a liberal spirit. But that to which most objected, and against which the Squire continued to rave, was the suffering such havoc to pass through the famous oaks.

"Miss Jerningham," said he, as the party made their way to the tea-table, "has not yet opened her mouth upon the question. With her taste and feelings, she must decide in favour of my view. Come now, Wymer, are you ready to submit to her decision?"

"Well, I do not know but I am: at all events, I should be glad to know her mind."

"No need to ask, I'll warrant ye," the other said. "With Miss Clara's notions of art, and romance, and imagination, and that sort of thing, she can have but one feeling about it, you know."

"Why should you take that for granted, sir?" said Clara, seeing, by her old friend's look, that he really wished to hear what she might have to say.

This was an awkward thrust for the worthy Squire, who did not like to give the answer, which rose na-

turally to his lips,—that one who had suffered her own career to be marked out by taste, and feeling, and imagination, rather than by sound sense and wisdom, was likely, in minor matters, to hear their voice alone.

"Is not this," she continued, "matter of judgment rather than of taste?"

The Squire, still farther disconcerted, to the no small amusement of the whole party, asked, somewhat confusedly, whether no count was to be taken of old associations, time-hallowed reminiscences, and that sort of thing?

"Yes; to a certain degree," was the answer. "But, with all that feeling of romance, for which you give me so large credit, I should say that these must yield to weightier considérations of public advantage, if, indeed, the two considerations should clash, as I don't think, that in this case, they do."

At this there was a general outcry, except upon Sir Jeffrey's part. How could Miss Jerningham—born and bred at Wymerton, and nurtured in its traditions,—not see the cruel outrage upon Alice Wymer's memory of a ruthless attack upon her darling trees?

Clara shook her head, but shrunk modestly from a regular disquisition. Old Sir Jeffrey, however, insisted upon her speaking out, with a mingled tone of authority and entreaty, which she could not well resist.

"Mr. Chilwood has appealed to my imagination; several of you, gentlemen, have reminded me that I was nursed in old associations of this dear old Wymerton. When I was a girl here, you may fancy, few living personages were more real to me than the dame Alice of those old traditions. In the oak room with the strips of

mirror, my own reflection would often appear to me to take the image of dear Dame Alice. I have looked out of window on the garden-beds and walks, by moonlight, and fancied that the moonshine was glistening on her satin brocade."

"And yet you would allow the railway ruffians to cut down her oaks! Oh, Miss Jerningham!"

"I had few children's books, you may remember, dear Sir Jeffrey," she continued, heedless of the interruption; "but used to read greedily the folios in the library. Alice's days were a fixed period, round which I would try to heap my studies. I read all I could about the times in which she lived, and the people who fashioned and were fashioned by their spirit. Alice became to me—she was and is—a definite person in a consistent drama."

"Well, Miss Jerningham, well, why should that incline you to let them cut down her oaks? I should have thought that one so life-like to your fancy, must be dear to your affections; and that you would have been first to cry shame upon the deed."

"Dame Alice is to me so real that I must give her a definite character. I cannot, of course, imagine her answering a board of railway directors asking leave to make a cutting though the park; but I *can* imagine a case, in her own times, which would give the measure of her thought and feeling.

"She was a London merchant's daughter. Her curly-haired Harry was styled adventurer by his proud kinsfolk, when he wooed and won her. Now, suppose the saplings she planted had been sturdy

forest trees; and letters came from the Ward of Chepe announcing that Master Martin Frobisher, forerunner of our Arctic heroes; or that bold heart, Sir Walter Raleigh, 'purposeth to builde mightie shippes at Gravesende for furtheraunce of discoverie, trade and mercature, of singular advantage to ye well-being and honourable estate of this realme of Englande: wherein it is most fyttinge that all and several the subjects of her Majestie's Highnesse should yield aide and assistaunce.' Suppose for such great purpose the oaks of fullest girth in Wymerton to be required, what would dame Alice have answered, and what her daring Harry? *My* imagination pictures them early in the glade next day. Alice's white hand daintily touches the giants, doomed through death to glory; the sinewy arm of Harry Wymer blazes the rough bark. Then come the woodmen."

"Ah, well, yes! ship-building, perhaps," said the burly squire, "and Sir Walter Raleigh—monstrous shame beheading him!—and old Martin Frobisher, and heart of oak, and wooden walls, and that sort of thing, you know—there might be something in *that;* but these wretched railways are quite *another* sort of thing, you know!"

"Not that I can see, sir," said Clara, pensively. A glow, for which none could account, suffused her countenance. She bethought her of the lake-side of Garda, of the long sandy strip outside the lagoons at Venice, and of one from whom she had listened to such discourse as influenced her ready conviction that these "wretched railways" of nineteenth century construction, no less than "the mightie shippes" of

Dame Alice's far-off times, were truly "for further-aunce of trade and mercature, of singular advantage to ye well-being and honourable estate of this realme of Englande."

"So, then, dear Clara," said old Sir Jeffrey, "this is your decision. No! rather Dame Alice's, spoken by your lips. I accept it. The rail shall go right through. The oaks, I have no doubt—that must be *your* consolation, Squire—will find their way to Her Majesty's dockyards. Queen Victoria's 'mightie shippes' are as grand, you will allow, as those of old Queen Bess. But Clara deserves reward for solving my remaining doubts. What moneys the said oaks may fetch shall go towards her marriage portion, when, like fair Alice, she finds her Harry. That's *my* decision."

Against this last clause there was no remonstrance, except the deepening glow on Clara's countenance.

Squire Chilwood soon retired in discomfiture to bed. Sir Jeffrey, before following his example, wrote to the directors that he had resolved, definitively, to accept their proposal.

Nevertheless, it rankled in Clara's mind that she should be supposed to have no guides but "taste, feeling, imagination, and that sort of thing." Their influence, it is true, had been great over her life, especially over its last few years. But if it had overlain, it had by no means stifled consciousness within her that life needs some wiser, steadier, nobler, guidance than their influence can give. She was uneasy at remembering how little practical effect this consciousness had wrought upon her late career.

Some few days after she received another admonitory shock.

There was a little hamlet on the outskirts of the Wymerton estate which, by some chance, she had not visited since her return. Thither she and Cousin Martha drove with some message from Sir Jeffrey to the tenant on the farm. The farmer's wife had known her in old times. As they recalled old names and incidents, she asked of Clara whether she remembered a certain grand-dame who lived, at one time, nearer to the house, whose pet she had been as a child. Clara remembered her well; she was one of those few that had spoken of her mother; one of those winsome souls, whose advance in years seems to make them regain some of the freshness of extreme youth, and thus to understand and be understood by all their youngers.

"I can scarcely forgive myself," said Clara, "for not having called her sooner to mind; I must have had some impression that, considering her age when I was last at Wymerton, she could be no longer living."

"Old enough she certainly was, Miss Clara, and has grown no younger since; but she is living still, though bed-ridden, and keeps her faculties wonderfully."

"You say she lives out here now. Where shall I find her? I cannot go without paying the dear old soul a visit."

"She lives with her daughter and son-in-law, people without children, in the third cottage on the left hand as you go down the lane."

Nothing could exceed the old woman's delight at seeing her "little pet" once more. The day was too

far spent to make a long visit possible; but another, and then another was paid, until the ponies knew well enough whither they were bound when Clara turned their heads toward the hamlet; nor was any pull upon the reins required when they had reached the cottage door.

"Tell me again about my mother, granny, and how you came to help her, when she first came housekeeping at the little house by the garden-lodge." And Clara repeated again the process through which, as a child, she had so often gone, of endeavouring from minute and trivial details to create a lively image of the mother whom memory could not recall.

"She was a dear creature, your mother, Miss Clara, for all her foreign looks. But her ways were English, every one of them; it would have done her heart good to see you grown such a downright English maid. I was wishing the very last time that you went, that she could set eyes upon you, just as you are; but for one thing."

"But for what one thing, granny, do tell me?"

"Well, since I've said it, I'd better, seemingly, say my say out. Don't be angry, Miss Clara, for I loved your mother, and I love you; but, poor dear thing, what would she have said, to see her darling baby-girl a play-actor!"

There was so much genuine good feeling in the old woman's tone, that Clara would have been ashamed not to choke down the rising indignation which she felt burning on her cheek.

"Why should you think, then, that my dear mother

would have disliked the profession I have chosen? Did you ever hear her speak of it or against it?"

"No! dear Miss Clara, never; but I judge by my own feelings. I am a mother too. I never saw play-acting more than once; at fair time, in the county town; and then—though I did think it grand at first—I felt a power of pity for the poor young lady in spangles, with ruddle on her cheeks, that all the folk stared and clapped hands at so rude. My Betsy was but a toddling thing, only just over the measles; yet it came across me, I'd sooner she'd a died in them than come to the like of that."

Was it still indignation, or a struggling sense of ridicule, which seemed to come up, with hysterical throb, into Clara's throat, and take away her breath, as she heard these words? She endeavoured, with what calm and exactness she could, to explain to her old friend, that there were many steps between herself and the "poor young lady with ruddle on her cheeks." But, for all her persuasion, the intractable granny held to her own opinion, that, be the steps never so many, the staircase, so to speak, was all one.

"There was a deal of wickedness," she had heard, "as went along, almost always, with that play-acting."

And though she never did believe, nor could, but what Miss Clara would be kept somehow out of *that*, as she had always prayed and prayed; yet she wished and prayed she were well out of it altogether.

"It seems so false-like and hollow, dear Miss Clara. Such a life, even as you tell it, I should think must

eat out all that's serious in a body's heart at last. Well, maybe I'm wrong. Who am I, to judge others? Yet it's natural to think so, seemingly. It don't seem to fit with letting alone the pomp and vanities; nor yet, as I can see, with praying not to be led into temptation." And the old woman entreated her not to be offended, and to kiss her before she left in token that she did not take amiss her plainness of speech.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NAVVIES. A STARTLED HEART.

EARLY spring-time came again. Not such as under foot of Appennines: yet gay at first with snowdrop and with crocus, by and by with primrose and with wild anemone, under the gnarled oaks.

The woodmen came, as in Clara's image of Dame Alice's days; and close upon the woodmen came "the navvies." Strapping fellows they; the father of Alice's Queen Bess would have rejoiced over such "marvellous proper men-at-arms." Whatever Squire Chilwood might have done to the "surveying scamps with their theodolites," even his broad shoulder and stout fore-arm would have found overmatch in a tussle to throw one of these into the mere.

No little terror heralded their coming. Farmers' wives counted their chickens, hatched or unhatched, ruefully foreboding lamentable deficiency. Watson groaned in bitter anticipation of rifled "nestisses," and considered the extinction of hares and rabbits imminent on the Wymerton estate. The county magistrates, the Squire at their head, determined in solemn conclave to

introduce into the county a number of blue-coated constables, a measure hitherto resisted tooth-and-nail, when proposed by audacious innovators, as an approach to the detestable French system of centralization, and an introduction of the thin end of a wedge of despotism and "espionage." The excellent but somewhat timid clergyman of the little church, under whose yew-trees stood Willie Jerningham's tomb, had also his fears, better grounded than those of others, as to the moral effect of their arrival among his flock.

The good man took, notwithstanding, the only wise determination—to "entreat" the men "as brothers," when they should come, not "as enemies;" trusting to Him in whose hand be the hearts of all men, to avert the threatening mischief, or to work out thence unexpected good.

The men's conduct, when they came, was not in all points irreproachable, but not as disorderly as had been expected. But for their drunkenness, that curse of English working men, there was little to complain of, save in a few special instances. It was remarkable that the chief offenders were not found so often in the regular ranks of these rough and powerful soldiers of industry as among the irregular volunteers and camp-followers, the Bashi-bazouks, if I may call them so, of the great earth-working campaign. Not one rude word, nor one insolent gesture, did the apprehensive parson of Wymerton receive from any man of them during their stay, save from one worthless scamp, his own parishioner, who had thrown up regular work to join them, and caricatured in his conduct he worst of their supposed characteristics.

Occasional mischief there may have been: outrage theer certainly was none.

That the rabbit-skins sometimes visible in the neighbourhood of the men's huts and lodgings had nothing to do with the springes found more abundantly just then by Watson and his vigilant subordinates in Wynnerton woods—or that the navvies had no connexion with the aforesaid more frequent springes—is perhaps not confidently to be affirmed; but even the less scrupulous of the men, authors of such misdeeds, drew distinction between creatures *ferœ naturœ* and occupants of the farmyard. Henroosts roosted undisturbed by larcenous intruders.

From the moment that actual havoc began amidst Alice's Oaks, Sir Jeffrey made it a frequent practice to walk down and inspect the works; and, from the first, nsisted that Clara, who had sealed the doom of the fine old trees, should have the courage to look upon the consequences of her decree. Of the navvies she had all along professed to have no personal fear, nor any shrinking from their rude appearance. Upon actual trial, her boast did not turn out unfounded. There must have been some token whereby the men themselves discerned upon her countenance the trustful sympathetic feeling she had towards them. They were not content with offering her no rudeness; but always greeted her with manly respect. At her presence, the coarse language, which, alas! would disgrace their talk among themselves, was hushed forthwith: a rough word dropped in disregard of it being met by such admonitory growl from his companions as checked at once the offender's tongue. The fall of the oaks had opened through the

cutting a view of much beauty. One day, Clara, though a poor performer with the pencil, brought down a sketch-book to attempt a drawing. It was a beautiful afternoon; but showers had fallen in the morning. The men were resting after their mid-day meal. She seated herself at some distance, on a bank cushioned with moss and grass. To cousin Martha's dread—for she was by no argument, nor any practical demonstration, to be moved from the tremulous awe of her prejudice against navvies—one of the square shouldered Titans, with huge whiskers, a red night-cap, unlaced high-lows much encrusted with clay, and shirt-sleeves tucked up above the muscular fore-arm, rose, and seizing some nondescript article, strode towards them. Cousin Martha plumped down upon the bank near Clara, and clung to her side in fear.

"Please, Miss," growled the giant, turning lobster-red with bashfulness, "would ye get up and stand aside a bit." Clara did so, with a frank smile of inquiry, cousin Martha with a spasmodic effort. Then did the earth-worker unfold his dubious bundle, a rough, but clean, pea-jacket of a thickness to defy a deluge. He spread it out neatly on the bank. "I reckon the grass is damper nor you knows on, Miss. Damp ain't nowise good for pratty critturs such as you: so to mak' bold, Miss, you sit down on that slop of mine, dry and comfurmable." And heedless of thanks or protestations, he turned upon his heel, and went his way to wheelbarrow, pickaxe, and spade.

The man was a "ganger," as it is termed in technical phraseology, a sort of sergeant of the working army; a leader of "free spades," instead of "free lances,"

as in mediæval days. He took, on behalf of his "gang," a subdivision of the contract for manual labour: "set out" the work, in proportion to each man's strength and skill; kept, very shrewdly, an equitable proportion between the respective amounts of work and wages, at each week's end; and daily preached the doctrine of "hard work and tidy," from sunrise till sunset, by example no less than by precept.

Joe Tanner by name, he was from the West Riding, a musical county, as some of my readers may know. The adventure of the jacket, which began, by no means ended his acquaintance with Clara. Being a ganger, he was not, as so many of his free-spades, in constant migration. Every time she came down that way, Clara saw him, and would exchange a few words with him. She pointed him out to Sir Jeffrey, in proof that she was right in refusing to draw too sharp a line between Dame Alice's days and these; and begged to inform Squire Chilwood, that she had met with a modern Raleigh among the "railway ruffians." Sir Jeffrey took a liking to the man, and always made inquiries of him about the progress of the work. One Sunday evening, having made a round on their way up from Wymerton, where they had spent an hour at the parsonage after service, the old baronet, Clara, and her cousin, chanced upon Mr. Tanner, walking to-and-fro, with horny hands embedded in the capacious pockets of that memorable pea-coat, they had some longer talk with him than usual: time and place being favourable. So it chanced, that going ever forward, they found themselves in company, close upon the house. Sir Jeffrey's hospitality would not allow him to dismiss the

"ganger" supperless: he, therefore, was invited to join the party in the servants' hall: Sir Jeffrey propitiating the wrath of the butler at the introduction of a "navvy," by telling him that the man had shown civility to Miss Jerningham. This apologetic explanation being graciously received, it was soon discovered that Mr. Tanner was one of those men who countersign their own passports. He was a shrewd pleasant-spoken man, not without dry humour and keen observation. He had seen a good deal of the country in his industrial campaigns, and not a little of society in its "engineering" and "excavating" circles.

"A very 'knowledgeable' sort of man—for a person in *his* condition of life," said the butler, with pompous condescension, in a chance mention of him, next day, to the second footman.

There was a small but sweet organ in the library; at family prayers, Sir Jeffrey, or any musical guest, would often lead a psalm. Since Clara had been "at home," as Sir Jeffrey *would* call it, there had seldom passed a night, never a Sunday night, without such observance. Some one in the servants' hall suggested, as prayer-bell rang, that Mr. Tanner might like to hear Miss Clara's singing; and the music-loving ear of the West Riding man made him glad to catch at the suggestion. It was a simple, severe, devotional tune, which he heard in the great library; but never had he heard music sung by such a voice as Clara's, nor by so finished a musician.

The butler considered the experiment a failure, so far as appreciation of Miss Clara's singing was concerned; for when he questioned the "ganger" thereupon, the only answer was—

"There now, mon, dont'ee talk of that now, dont'ee!"

But though he refused to talk of it to the butler, and though it was some time before he could make up his mind to talk of it at all, he could not refrain himself, and at last let Clara know herself the impression her music had made on him.

"I would gi' a good summat mysen," he said, "to hear 'the likes of such' again; and a good deal too to let some of our chaps get hearin' o' it; though I can't well see how it's to be managed, Miss!"

"I do, though," said Sir Jeffrey, when Clara, that day, at dinner, related her conversation with Joe.

"We'll give a party, and ask the navvies; have music in the library, and supper in the hall. Mr. Owen, at Wymerton, has said a good deal about treating them in a friendly way, and I think he will be in favour of the move. We must have him up here to superintend."

Clara clapped her hands with glee, like a child, at the proposal.

Mr. Owen *was* in favour of the proceeding; and after consideration of details, an invitation was made in due form, through Tanner, to the party at work on the Wymerton cutting. They were about fifty. On the appointed evening they marched up in order, with the overlooker, timekeeper, and gangers. More of them than might have been expected appeared in cloth coats; some in blue "slops," others in white, washed to a dazzling brilliancy.

The concert—for to such proportions had the musical entertainment grown—was both instrumental and vocal. Sir Jeffrey thought that all the company might not

appreciate Clara's performances as Mr. Tanner did, and, consequently, secured the services of a brass band from a neighbouring town. The rousing strains of that powerful orchestra were much approved and applauded —there was one trombone, in particular, whose vibration threw down (so the housemaid asserted) a bust, of which it is certain that the nose was soon after found mysteriously broken one morning. But the last offence which even the Squire, who was present, could charge upon the auditory, was want of delight and enthusiasm at the singing. Clara, bent upon securing their approbation, had carefully selected her music, and arranged it in skilful gradation. She first sang a ballad or two, each embodying a simple and touching story. These she declaimed musically, rather than actually sung. The silvery precision with which every syllable was given, the emphasis which marked every word pregnant with special meaning, brought home to the understanding and feeling of the simplest of her rough hearers, the effect intended by the triple harmony of imagery, rhythm, and music. "There now, poor thing!" was the responsive murmur which greeted the sadder of the tales. When she next sung, the music, plaintive still, but more ornate, told its own tale, with less help from the words, still English. The third piece was thoroughly scientific, a work of Beethoven's; the German wording counted, of course, for nothing. At last she gave them, in its native Italian, a passage from one of the old Maestro's operas, composed expressly for herself, studied with the most assiduous care, to every peculiarity of her voice and style. There was in it, a recitative, solemn and vibrating, tending to a hymn of invocation. In the

opera itself, a crowd came in, and formed and packed itself about the songstress, wrapped in oblivion of all that passed around her. To them she turned upon a sudden, and burst into a passionate ode of exhortation. Nine or ten bars of this vehement address had not been uttered, when the enthusiasm of the men passed all bounds; they interrupted her with a round of cheers, stamping with their thick high-lows on the library floor, jumping up from their seats, and clapping hands. She had carried her audience by storm.

Sir Jeffrey judged this to be the climax of the musical festivity; and as soon as Clara had done, gave the signal for adjournment to the hall, where a supper, which other guests than navvies might have thought sumptuous, was laid out. One little attention, which Clara herself had thought of paying them, was appreciated more delicately than she had thought possible. She had made up a little nosegay of flowers to lay in each man's plate; and was charmed to see how one and all fastened it in their button-holes, or pinned it to their frocks. There were strange and happy sights to be seen that evening in the hall at Wymerton. Compilers of etiquette manuals might have found serious fault with some of the knife and fork manœuvres; the passing of cuffs along the rims of tankards, though well-meant, might have appeared to them, in strictness, reprehensible. But the respectful, almost bashful demeanour of the Titans could not have failed to conciliate the good-will of any observer of healthy mind. Clara, Mrs. Owen, and a few other ladies, sat at a transverse board, or "high table," as they say in Oxford: in the centre of which, as master of the feast, sat Sir Jeffrey. But the

two great side-tables, which went lengthwise through the hall, had each a chosen president and vice-president, with a sprinkling of gentlemen on either side among the labouring guests. Only fancy the Squire himself, carried away by the stream of sociable good feeling, occupied, as chairman at one of them, in wielding a colossal carving knife and fork against a mountainous round of spiced beef, worthy to be dispensed to "railway ruffians," by so stalwart and steel-wristed a carver.

Of Parson Owen's timidity not a trace was discernible that night. He was quite at home with the names and persons of Bill, and Bob, and Tom, and Jim, and other holders of curtailed Saxon appellations. If not so vigorous a carver as the sporting squire, he was keen to detect empty plates, and handy at re-filling them; in the lighter skirmishings with puddings, custards, tarts and jellies, that succeeded to severer encounters, he proved himself to possess talents which the Squire might himself have envied.

He made a very good little speech, too, did Parson Owen, that evening, when it came to his turn, kindly meant and kindly taken, having a gentle earnestness befitting the character and calling of him who made it.

So the success of the party was throughout unquestionable. One grand incident, to which I should in vain endeavour to do full justice, being the Yorkshire oration of Joe Tanner in returning thanks on the men's behalf, and proposing the health of the "yoong lady."

Two days after, there was an unexpected arrival at Wymerton.

The old Maestro made his appearance, and met with a

hearty welcome, he had a general invitation from Sir Jeffrey, and considered himself to have full right of access wherever his dear and gifted pupil might be; Clara knew his every mood so well, that she soon perceived that he was brooding upon something. His excitement, alternating with absence of mind, was manifestly different from that which the throbbing of his genius would sometimes work in him: there was a restlessness, such as she had never noticed before. She was the first to detect this, but was not long left alone in observing it.

"I can't imagine, Clara, dear," said cousin Martha, "what can have come to the Maestro: don't you see how unlike himself he is since he came here?"

"Unlike himself, perhaps, is too strong a word; but some peculiarity I have seen."

"It's not a musical fit, Clara: I've watched him through two or three. Though he's queer enough in one of them, its another sort of queerness altogether."

This perhaps was not the exact formula which Clara would herself have used; but it gave expression to the judgment she had formed herself, and she could not gainsay her cousin.

"Depend upon it," Martha resumed, "there's something on his mind that wants to come off it; something serious too. I wonder whether he has any bad news to tell. Where did he come from, Clara?"

"He said he spent a short time in London on his way here. He had come straight from Italy."

"Can it be anything about the poor young countess, or her brother?" suggested Martha. A pang of fear passed for an instant over Clara's heart; but she had at hand an answer.

"No, thank God! Pia is well: though her brother is yet absent, she expresses no alarm or apprehension for him. I have a letter from her, later than any the Maestro could have brought: for she mentions his having left Florence."

Cousin Martha was not over quick of apprehension; it took her some few minutes to turn this over in her thoughts and to adopt the conclusion that her suggestion was in all probability erroneous.

She went on knitting, as she pondered the force of Clara's answer. Clara herself was copying music at a writing table: no sound broke the silence but the dottings of her own pen on the manuscript.

"I'm certain, though, there's some bad news," began again her cousin. Then after another silence—

"Perhaps Mark Brandling's dead: the Maestro was very fond of him, dear fellow! And we've heard nothing these months about him."

So keen and quick the pang was which darted now through Clara's heart—so unexpected and strange in its keen quickness, that the pen dropped from her fingers, and she pressed both her hands for a moment to her side.

The action was over before Martha raised her eyes from the knitting; whatsoever it had betrayed, it had betrayed to herself alone: nor did a quiver in her tone let her cousin know the effort it cost her, to her own infinite surprise, to say, "How can you take up such unreasonable fancies, Martha?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAESTRO'S NOTION.

VERY eagerly did Clara scan the Maestro's countenance when next they met. Very searchingly did she note, and very accurately balance, every token of disturbance in his look, word, manner. Had she felt no very special interest at stake in the solution of the question, she would have been satisfied there could be no grounds for her cousin's conjecture. She would have confidently relied upon what her own finer observation taught her, that with whatever secret the Maestro's mind was charged, it was not of such weighty and sad import as the death of any friend.

As mere matter of judgment, she felt sure of her negative conviction. But she could not hide it from herself that something in her, less cool, determinate and wise, than judgment, longed for some unquestionable confirmation of the quieting truth.

How different are our estimates of other persons' peculiarities, according as they thwart or forward an object we have at heart. Good cousin Martha had a fidgety way with her, ending in outbursts of blunt assertion, or of awkward questioning, which, not seldom, tried Clara's patience sorely, and would send the blood tingling into her ears with annoyance. The

dead set which Martha made that evening at the tea-table upon the supposed secret of the Maestro, was just of that kind which, most times, would have provoked her almost beyond endurance; but if she were at all provoked now, it was only at perceiving with what tact and skill the Maestro appeared to evade her cousin's simple fussy strategy.

Not choosing, however, to be foiled, cousin Martha determined to hurry on a crisis by putting in abrupt succession two downright questions.

"Do you remember Mark, Maestro?"

"Mark, Miss Martha. Do you mean my friend, the Vulcan, at Venice? Of course I remember him."

Clara had scarcely time to assure herself that his look and tone confirmed her previous conclusion, before the second question was put, an answer to which must needs solve every doubt.

"Have you seen him since you have been in England, or heard of him at all?"

"I have neither seen nor heard of him, dear Miss Martha; how should I? I was two days in London, and then came here; wherever Vulcan may be, he thinks I am in Italy. What made you ask? I shall begin to make inquiries in return."

Clara gave no farther heed. A glow of tremulous joy passed, not over, but right through her; for the Maestro's words dispersed the cold cloud of dread which, as by evil spell, the morbid fancy of her cousin had called up.

She knew now that the day had brought a serious crisis to her inmost self. Unexpected, it was yet unquestionable. Henceforth there could be no blinding her

self-consciousness. It was impossible to misunderstand the meaning of the spasm she had felt at cousin Martha's word, or of the relief the Maestro's word had given.

Engrossed for that one evening by such strange reflections, she forgot her interest in the Maestro's unwonted manner.

But the next morning, as she passed through the breakfast-room window to the garden, she became aware that whatever the secret might be, the time had come for his confiding it to Sir Jeffrey. For as she turned and bent down by the window-sill to pick a flower, she heard the Maestro say—

"Well, it must finish, Sir Jeffrey, and you must know for what I came to Wymerton. Can you spare half an hour, and walk down by the mere, where we shall be alone?"

The baronet put an arm in his, and Clara saw them walk off together.

"My dear Sir Jeffrey," said the Italian, as they went along, "tell me frankly, would it be ridiculous if I should take a wife?"

"A wife! Maestro. Well, if I must speak the truth, I should say that you and I—we're much of one standing I reckon—should have thought of taking one sooner, or not at all."

"Possibly. But yet you see, in our dear Clara's case—"

"Clara's! My dear Maestro, ridiculous is too weak a word"—

"Stop, caro signor mio, stop! Here's an imbroglio to begin with, all because I have not begun at the beginning!"

"Well, then, begin over again," said the baronet, with good humour, "I will promise not to interrupt till you have stated your case."

"First of all, then," said the musician, "our dear Clara is an artist, and an artist she will always be."

"That she is one, Maestro, I must needs admit. Who could gainsay it, when such a man as you affirm? But my hope is that artist she may *not* always be."

"I know too well what manner of artist-soul is in yourself," rejoined the other, "to misunderstand your meaning. You are not one of those dull lumps of clay which despise the glory of a gift they cannot understand You object to artist-life for Clara only because of some of its conditions. Is it not so?"

"I should hardly sum up so briefly the score of my objections; yet I believe you rightly feel the nature of them on the whole. You know, from the first, I was unwilling Clara should adopt the "vocation," as she termed it, of an artist. As a mere friend, I should have shown the same unwillingness; but the child was born and bred almost under my roof, and I have always had for her a sort of father-love."

"And she for you a sort of daughter-love; but these qualified relations of love and duty are not absolute. You did not think yourself justified in forbidding her peremptorily from following her inclination, nor did she hold herself obliged to sacrifice it to your desire."

"True enough. Yet I trusted that at last we should be of one mind."

"Ah, you counted upon her giving way before technical difficulties, or upon her conceiving disgust at

professional affronts. You thought her feet would be too tender to scale stony heights. But allow you miscalculated, Sir Jeffrey."

"Well, I must own her tenacity and perseverance have been stronger than I had thought."

"Yes, yes!" said the Maestro, rubbing his hands with gentle motion, one over the other, exulting in the thought that he had a deeper, truer appreciation of his favourite's character than the man that had watched her from her cradle. "Yes, yes! you had not full measure of Clara's strength of purpose then: nor yet, perhaps, of something nobler. The difficulties strength would conquer; to conquer the disgusts required some better thing. She was too high-minded to let small jealousies and envies move her out of her way to greatness and success. Ah! how can you think anything will beat or drive her back from greatness now! I say again, she is and she will be an artist. You must feel I am speaking truth."

"Suppose it to be so, what then, Maestro?"

"Why then I may feel safe in saying what I shrunk from;—that there are certain circumstances and conditions of artist-life, from which I am as jealous to guard her as you can be. Now this marriage, on which I meant to consult you, seems to me to meet most of the difficulties"—

"My dear Maestro, forgive me, if once again I say that any notion so preposterous"—

"Preposterous, Sir Jeffrey! how so?"

"Why, consider your age alone."

"Well, I grant you I should be no jaunty bridegroom; but, as a set-off, the bride's years almost equal mine."

"Equal yours! Have you lost your mind, Maestro?"

"Not a bit of it. I may be some way past sixty; she will never see fifty-five again."

"Clara not see five-and-fifty! why, man, you must be staring mad!" said Sir Jeffrey, stepping forward three hurried paces, and turning round to look him full in the face.

"Mad yourself, caro signor mio! Who spoke of Clara's age?"

"Why, you said the bride, that is the lady you meant to marry"—

"Well, and what has the bride's age to do with Clara's?"

"Were you not talking of proposing marriage to Clara, then?"

"Altro! carissimo, altro!" and the good old Maestro went off into fits of laughter.

"Of whom then, on earth, were you speaking?" inquired Sir Jeffrey, with puzzled look, as if yet doubtful of his companion's sanity. Were you not talking of meeting the difficulties of Clara's position by marrying"—

"Marrying, by all means; but not my own dear musical daughter. You might indeed think I had taken a last leave of my wits."

"Whom then did, or do you think of marrying, in the name of all that's wonderful?"

"Why, cousin Martha, to be sure!" said the Maestro. "You see, Sir Jeffrey, the dear girl is alone in the world: and must be so. You said just now you had a *sort* of father-love for her, and I took care to strengthen the stress upon the word, when answering that she had also a *sort* of daughter-love for you. And I took care to say that these affections were but a qualified, not an

absolute bond between you. What if you *should* persuade her to give up her calling? Even at your age —we may speak freely upon dates, I take it, after what has passed between us: even at your age, it is not so certain that a cynical world would sanction your adoption of her as daughter, and her abode under your roof as mistress of your house, eh?"

"Well, I must own that some such undefined apprehension seemed to cramp my liberty of action even when my whole thought was to keep her from Italy and from the stage. I longed to say, 'Clara, stay at Wymerton, and be my daughter,' and yet felt it doubtful whether I could justify the invitation."

"Very good; I need insist upon this point no more. But, after all, it can never be practically discussed, till that comes to pass which is of all things least likely."

"You mean her consenting to forego her brilliant and successful career?"

"Precisely. In the vicissitudes of her artist-life you must perceive that it is still more impossible for you to assume effectually a paternal position, and to afford her constant and complete protection."

Sir Jeffrey could not, in reason, gainsay this last assertion; he compressed his lips and shook his head, as if in reluctant admission of its truth. The Maestro, beating time with the forefinger of his right hand in the air, as if his argument were a musical cadence, proceeded:

"Cousin Martha is to all intents and purposes our Clara's mother."

Sir Jeffrey smiled, almost unconsciously, at the thought of ascribing to that good creature any such

authoritative character; the Maestro, divining the meaning of the smile, said, as he caught its infection—

"Yes! yes! I know that; but without being undutiful, a daughter's stronger character may control a mother's weaker mind. Yet there is a dash of mother-love in the sister-love with which Miss Martha cleaves to her cousin. She is her oldest and nearest female relative; from Clara's first step in her career she has never left, nor thought of leaving her a single day. I will correct myself; instead of saying 'cousin Martha is Clara's mother, to *all* intents and purposes,' I will put it so, 'she is for many purposes the only mother our glorious orphan can have.'"

"Your notion is, then, that by making her your wife, you would restore, for some intents and purposes, a father to poor Clara?"

"Just so, my dear Sir Jeffrey, just so; I should at least gain a right—I should incur a duty—of following Clara's footsteps; of watching over her, of guiding her, of answering for her sometimes, and of shielding her always. For an old man's interposition is always a venerable, if not always a powerful safeguard."

"Especially, Maestro, when his character and course of life have commanded such esteem and respect, in public and in private, as are justly yours."

"You speak too kindly; I well know that many friends accord me far more esteem and regard than ever I have deserved. Yet the fact of their granting so much, influences my mind in this matter. In some respects I could wish for some one more competent than I to discharge the duties of a guardian towards

Clara; but my long acquaintance with this artist-life, and my connexion of long standing with the principal managers of artistic affairs, give me, perhaps, some special advantages. And now that you know my mind, tell me, frankly, dear Sir Jeffrey, should I do wrong in offering marriage to 'cousin Martha?'"

"Really, Maestro, the question is so unexpected that I feel at a loss to give an answer. But first frankly tell me, do I know your whole mind on the matter? it may help me to make up mine upon it."

"What whole mind, dear sir? I have told you of things just as they are."

"Do I understand you, then, that Clara's interest, advantage, comfort, is all you would thus seek to secure?"

"What other object could I possibly have in view?"

"I hardly like to suggest it," said the baronet, with a little hesitation; "but there are certain sentiments—or shall I say feelings?—or, in short, one might feel inclined to ask,—whether—in fact"——

"Al piacere suo signor; ask any question which seems good: ask outright; I will answer openly."

"Well, then, with regard to your feelings for herelf."

"For whom? For Clara?—why, no father, I verily do believe, *could* love a darling daughter better. Her genius and her talent I did not give her, it is true; but I have done so much to mould and fashion them"——

"Yes! But I am not asking about your attachment to Clara."

"To whom then?"

"To the woman you propose to marry, to her cousin Martha, of course."

The old Maestro looked up into his friend's face with an air of genuine perplexity and surprise; it really seemed as if these last words had presented him with a novel view of the matter under discussion.

"In truth, my dear sir," he said, slowly and deliberately, as if feeling his way upon new and unaccustomed ground: "in truth, I never thought of this branch of the subject. I don't know that I have any peculiar attachment for Miss Martha, now you mention it. There *are* certain sentiments, as you very justly say; but whether my sentiments——at any rate Miss Martha is an estimable person,—yes,—an amiable person, and entirely devoted to Clara. Yes—that is the point, you see, Sir Jeffrey—entirely devoted to Clara.

"But what of her devotedness to you, my dear Maestro? It is usual in these cases to give some thought to that point as well. Have you reason to believe that cousin Martha would lend a favourable ear to such a proposal as you contemplate?"

"Why not? when it is evident that Clara's position"——

"Say no more, my good friend," interrupted Sir Jeffrey, "you have answered abundantly the questions I wished to put. In all this scheme, if I do not misunderstand you, there is nothing personal to cousin Martha, nothing personal to yourself, which enters into the calculation?"

"My dear Sir Jeffrey, you read my mind as an open book."

"It follows, then, that you are in no hurry to carry out this notion?"

"None just now; but I may be."

"In what case, pray?"

"In case I can persuade your musical folk in England to take my word for Clara's genius and marvellous attainments. In Italy they did so; not of course without objecting, as they will do in London, that she had not served a long enough apprenticeship to fame. As if Alexander had not half conquered his world at five-and-twenty!"

The Maestro stamped, and threw into the air the pinch of snuff his fingers held.

Sir Jeffrey smiled at the strange but genuine enthusiasm of the old musician. For a few minutes both were silent; then he said:—

"Promise me one thing, Maestro, for that half-fatherhood sake we spoke of."

"Well, dear sir, name it."

"Put off all execution of your scheme, all further mention of it, till it is clear that Clara launches out again on the professional sea. There is no fear of shipwreck for her here, just now."

"Shipwreck, shipwreck, my dear sir! I dare say Nelson's mother would have kept him ashore his life long—all for fear of it. Well, I promise you. But stop a minute—I will not sign treaty blindfold."

"What are your conditions, then?"

"This only, I will not be bound to break off my endeavour to further my pupil's grand career. If I can get my frigate commissioned, I put at once to sea; and ask cousin Martha straight off to be purser, housekeeper—how say you—eh?"

"Say? What can I say, but that I hope the Admiralty

will prove impracticable, and the bonny Clara long lie safe in dock, Maestro."

"Che sarà, sarà, my good Sir Jeffrey, but I shall make a vigorous attempt."

"All ill success attend it! Let us say no more. We shan't convince each other, and may fall out. Shall I tell Clara?—in confidence, of course."

"Just as you please, dear sir; but I don't want her to speak again of it to me, nor to interfere with cousin Martha. Ah! what a screech! what a discordant hideous whistle! that will be the engine down at the iron road there, will it not? Surely they might make the steam breath sound a note which should be penetrating, and yet musical."

Clara's astonishment was great at learning what had wrought such manifest disturbance in the mind of her old musical mentor. She was touched to the quick by this proof of an affection more tender, generous, and provident than she could have known that the Maestro cherished for her, though she had long been accustomed to rely upon the heartiness and sincerity of his friendship. But the brimming tears, which gratitude brought up under her eyelids, would perforce be shaken thence by irresistible laughter at the ludicrous incongruity between the facts of the case and the conjectures in which cousin Martha had indulged with so much mistaken ingenuity concerning them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TUNNEL. THE BERSERKS AND THE RUNEMAIDEN.

JUST beyond the cutting, which brought the rails upon the necessary level through Dame Alice's Oaks, the ground took a sudden rise. A tunnel must be driven through the base of the hill. Its entrance would be within, its exit without, the boundaries of the estate. "But," said Joe Tanner, "I doubt, Sir Jeffrey, you won't have seen the last of us this side o' your park palins so soon as ye might wish, for all we're close upon the line o' 'em."

"Why, Tanner," said the baronet, "I'm not in any hurry to be rid of you, nor of your strapping mates. I've no quarrel with one of them, to my knowledge; and you and I are friends, I hope, for good and all. But since you are so near the palings, as you say, what is to keep you any length of time on this side of their line?"

"Toonnel, Sir Jeffrey, sure; what else?"

"What! a little bore of that length stop such a gang as yours for any time? I should have looked to see your spades and picks go through it, as a grocer's scoop through a last year's cheese."

"Well, sir, if we got this bit o' hill-side put under a taight screw, for a month or two—like the cheese you talk on—wi' a giant dairy-maid to give screw a turn o' mornin's reg'lar, mayhap the whey 'd run out a bit, and then a man mought talk o' puttin' a scoop through un, easy like."

"The whey run out a bit, man! What do you mean?"

"Somewhat aboot what I said, sir. There's milk enough in yon cheese to trickle down a bit, and spoil scoopin': leastways, unless Joe's out in his reckonin'."

"What—you mean there's wet work likely to be come across in boring here—springs, and so on?"

"Ay, sir! Wet enough work; wi' shifty slippery stooff for wet to soak into. Nowt tough and sticky seemin'ly, like that cheese o' your'n."

"Well, Tanner, I'm no geologist, I'm sorry to say. I suppose the strata lay pretty much in my time where they lie now; but no professor ever taught me to cut scientific sandwiches through them. You may be right or wrong, I can't contradict you."

"Can't say as I be much o' a 'geeologer' neither in book way; but I knows the carrakter o' a bit o' ground, when I sees un; special when I has a shaft or two sunk. See there, under yon ash,—near the palins,—where the muck lies:—that's one little hole I made a Saturday; but he's a deep un. Then there's another, aboot two hundred yards a t'other side, down to the right a bit. Ah! and another, further on, where the land dips to the 'Pigs-mash' as they call it—that's off your land you know."

"Well Joe! so you sunk shafts,—like my grocer after all, cheese tasting—and scooped up a sample of what's underneath the scrubby hill-side, eh! And that makes you think there'll be trouble with the springs in tunnelling. Has the company's chief engineer had a look at it?"

"Ah! He's had a look. And squinted oogly enough to my mind when he had."

"Did you hear him give an opinion on the matter?"

"No! I didn't hear un give no 'pinion. He ain't much in the way of givin' 'em I reckon. Its contractor's trooble, not company's, when toonnels is unpleasant a borin'!"

"And trouble this tunnel *is* to give some one, *you* think. Let's hope you may be mistaken, Joe."

"Hope! yes! I'll hope; there's no harm in hopin', as I knows on;—but if we don't have a sloppy job, and a worrit wi' water in the toonnel, I'm a Dootchman—there now. 'Mornin', sir. How's yoong lady, if I may ax afore ye go?"

"Fresh and hearty, thank ye, Joe, singing like a wood-thrush when I came out this morning."

"Tell 'ee what, sir. It's tidy singin' is throoshes'; but that Miss Clara o' yourn could teach throosh a notion about singin': so she could."

"Come up on Sunday evening then, and have supper, and you'll hear one of her psalms again. I dare say she'll come across you between this and then, and give you an invitation of her own. Good morning, Joe!"

Clara did come across her "navigator" friend before the Sunday, and did give the invitation, as Sir Jeffrey expected. The Yorkshireman, on his part, was

devising the feasibility of making some return for the civility shown to his mates and him, endeavouring to light upon some circumstance which should justify them in sending an invitation to the baronet and the young lady. Parson Owen, unwittingly, gave him the hint he was seeking. There was a village "revel" kept some five miles from Wymerton, whereof he dreaded at all times, not without reason, the effect on his own parish. It was a favourite resort of holiday-making lads and lasses from all the country side; but lads and lasses alike had often found cause to rue their presence at that resort of rustic dissipation.

"I suppose, Joe, your men will be striking work on Thursday next, for Cameley revel?"

"Most on 'em will, sir, I reckon."

"What a pity, too, just now, when things have been going on so quietly. There has been no great drink or mischief for so long! I know that wretched revel will do harm. Don't you think it will, Joe?"

"Well, ye know, the men will always get wild upon a spree, worse luck! The longer they've been quiet, the wilder they bust out by times."

"I suppose it's no use talking to them about not going down to Cameley, and keeping to work that day?"

"I don't know but it mought hap *our* chaps would stick to work the a'ternoon, sir, if it lay on them. But ye see ther's a lot o' chaps as don't set up for 'navvies,' regular, but helps and tends, you know. They're all men of the neighbourhood; 'tis they set the talk of Cameley revel agoin'. I doubt they're used to keep this holiday, and won't be gotten to work a stroke after dinnerin' at noon. That will stop *us*

you see: our chaps will have nowt to do, but follow 'em down to Cameley yonder."

"Too true, too true," said Parson Owen, with a rueful shake of his head: "work stopped—the men idle—and the revel not five miles off. There'll be no keeping them out of it, that I can think of. We *do* manage to keep our younger school-children from it, Mrs. Owen and I, that's to say nine out of every ten, or more; but that's not to be thought of with navvies."

"How d'ye frame it now to keep the bairns away from Cameley?—if there's drink to draw my chaps down, there's peep-shows and spice-bread to coax the little uns."

"Oh! that's easy enough Joe. We have a 'revel' of our own that afternoon; tea and romps in the rectory garden, and spice-bread in plenty, with nothing to pay for it."

"Ah! nowt to pay for't—that's where ye beats the revel hollow, parson, I reckon."

After a pause, Joe drew rapidly his right hand from its meditative plunge into the wide pocket of his corduroys; and slapped his thigh with a force which startled a squirrel peering down from the lower branch of one of the famous oaks of Alice. "Yon's a fine plan o' yourn, about the bairns, ye know, and joost the thing for our chaps if they'll fall in wi' it."

"What! Tea, and romps, and spice-bread in the rectory garden, keep your men from the 'revel,' Joe? Why, the place isn't big enough to hold them; and in point of fact—to tell you the honest truth—it's as much as I can afford to treat the children, as the party's all my own, and has nothing to do with the school feast which Sir Jeffrey"——

"There, sir, don't 'ee trouble nowt about that," said Tanner, with some loftiness; "we know your heart's larger nor your money-bag, Mr. Owen. Some of our chaps' sick missuses ha' found oot that. The weather's been fine, and the work fairish these weeks; there's no want o' brass in our breeches pocket just now. Mayhap, if there were, the chaps would think less o' goin' down to Cameley now. We don't want no one to gi' *us* a party; but I've been a thinkin' this good bit as 'twas our turn to gi' one."

"Give one! Explain yourself, my good friend, I don't see what you are aiming at."

"Why, yes, it should be gi' and tak', ye know; and t'ould gentleman up at house treated us as his own sort. I've a wished afore now, to ax him and the singin'-bird, Miss Clara there, to tea or summat. Some o' the chaps said they'd like to do it well enough. Your talk o' keepin' folk from yon revel seems to put it in one's way. If we could have a quiet 'to-do' a Thursday on our own hook: there's none but three or four may-be wouldn't stay up here for it."

"I am sure, my good friend, it's a very excellent idea, if one could see one's way to setting it a-going. Although, perhaps, there would be something unusual in"——

"I've got it!" interrupted Joe, with another portentous slap, that startled timid Mr. Owen, almost as much as the first had startled little bushy-tail.

"I sees *my* way to settin' it a goin': and goin' famous too, if it warn't for want o' a 'moggany wheel-barrer.'"

"Do I understand you to say 'a mahogany wheel-barrow,' Tanner? For what possible purpose can you

want such an implement, and how could it possibly help out the party?"

"Ah, yes!" continued the navvy, in soliloquy, rather than answer. "A moggany wheel-barrer, to be sure, and a small bright spade, wi' a handle o' hard black 'ood, roobbed shiny; yes, and a little pick to match. If I could get hold o' *them*, we mought do the thing hansum now!"

"Do *what* thing handsome, Tanner! I am more than ever at a loss to catch your meaning."

"Why, look ye, Mr. Owen; you said but now, it wasn't usual . . . well, I suppose ye meant for gentlefolk to come to navigators' tea-meetin's. Not as I've knowed much tea-meetin's among the navvies anyhow, mayhap you'll say. But gentlemen and workmen's much o' one flesh and blood I reckon. I've heerd a parson read summat rather like it out of the good book now!"

"I am sure—Tanner—I hope, at least, you've never known me do or say a thing intentionally to go against a truth of such a kind. Differences of rank and condition"——

Here good Parson Owen might perchance have fallen into homily, had not his sturdy interlocutor cut it short.

"Well, well, sir, you've all'ays treated us as a mon should men, so we've no call to quarrel over that bone, not you and I haven't. But when you said unusual, it stroock me, as many good things is unusual: yet I could mind a grand 'to-do' wi' gentlefolk and railway folk together, as I was one of, once."

"And was there a mahogany wheelbarrow, Tanner?"

"I believe ye, and a tidy play-toy, too, wi' a little

spade, and a little pick, and a square inch o' siller plate on all three of 'em, and a 'scription on the inch.

"It wer' a grand joonction they gotten in hand; so they had a parliament mon down to 'turn first sod'—a pompious like old chap, wi' a white waistcoat, and no more waist nor a meal-tub; pratty fair at a speech though, wi' claims of labour, and 'operative millions,' though I heerd he voted agin' the big loaf, more shame to him."

"I understand now what made you think of an ornamental barrow, pick, and spade; still I am at a loss to see what they should have to do with getting up some sort of party here on Thursday next."

"You're rather slow then to pick oop a mon's meanin', hopin' no offence."

"No offence whatever; but I still confess I don't perceive your drift. There's no first sod to turn here, Tanner, after all the havoc your men have made in the glade."

"I didn't think there were," retorted Joe, "but there's a toonnel to put first pick in; work joost laid out, and all ready to start wi'. Seemed to me we could have t'ould barrinet, or may be, the yoong lady lass to wheel away first barrerful o' stoof."

"Capital! I see it all now, as plain as you do. There are several of your men's children in the school at Wymerton, that will be a good excuse for my joining in the thing, with all the rompers from the rectory garden, if you are not too proud to let the parson go shares in your party, eh, Tanner?" said Mr. Owen with a smile, that seemed to pay off the navigator playfully for the lofty tone in which he had repudiated the

notion of wanting help towards the projected entertainment.

It was finally agreed that, with a judicious ignoring of the Cameley revel, Tanner should propound the scheme that evening to his mates. In case of its finding favour, he should on the next day make appearance at the rectory, and in solemn conclave with the parson and his practical little wife, proceed to mould its rough clay into determinate and detailed design.

"The chaps all took to it keener than I'd a reckoned, Mr. Owen: blazed out aboot it; special aboot the toonnel and the barrer. But they says t'ould gentleman shan't wheel it; nor touch pick and spade, ye know. The lady lass must wheel a load along a plank for loock and love, they says."

"So let it be then; but how shall we get a set of little tools between to-night and Thursday?"

"Oh, that's all settled. Moggany can't be come at easy hereabouts, nor that black 'ood as polishes to make tool-handles wi'. But Jimmy Lockwood, our contractor's carpenter, has got a pratty slab o' walnut: he's boun' to turn us oot a baby barrer very neat. Got a bit o' maple, too, will mak' a tidy pair o' handles: blacksmith Bob will fit 'em wi' irons, fit for a fairy, so he says."

"I have no doubt he will. He is a first-rate workman, that blacksmith of yours, I am told."

"An oot-and-oot good smith: handy at other jobs too. Now aboot the eatin' and drinkin' o' it, and so on."

"Here! Jane, my dear," cried Mr. Owen to his pleasant housewife, as she passed the open study door;

"here's Tanner come up about the navvies' feast on Thursday, and we want your advice upon all manner of details." Mrs. Owen's practical wisdom and experience were soon controlling the conference, bringing matters rapidly to tangible issue.

The invitation, conveyed to Clara and Sir Jeffrey by Mr. Tanner in person, was accepted heartily. Cousin Martha and the Maestro were included in it; and the men were much gratified with the punctilious politeness of Sir Jeffrey, in writing to request the favour of being allowed to bring another guest, who had unexpectedly announced himself at the house for Thursday. This guest, by the decree of some kindly-smiling, good-neighbourly Nemesis, proved to be none other than the cheery hater of railways and railway folk, Squire Chilwood.

He could not deny that—thanks to Mrs. Owen, to the village schoolmistress, and to her little maidens, with help from the few railway matrons: willing workers, these, if not very tasteful designers—all the externals of this little *fête* had been very prettily laid out. The grass was mown close up to the hillside which the tunnel was to pierce; on its rich velvet, the carpenter Lockwood had, with a few planks and trestles, set up tables and benches for the banquet. Mrs. Owen had covered the former with snowy linen. They stood in tiers upon the sloping ground, with plenty of space to pass in and out between. On the highest level stood the table for the guests, facing down hill, with benches on the upper side alone. Below, *en échelon*, as soldiers say, were the other tables, their benches also placed on one side only, facing upwards, so that all could look upon the countenances

of the Olympians at the upper board. Every smile upon the face of Clara, queen of the feast, could thus let fall its beam upon all her entertainers. For the children the grassy bank had a convenient fold or natural terrace just beneath, where they could sit unrestrained to enjoy the fruits, cake, and fresh milk provided in abundance. On the tables spread for their elders these dainties, at least the cake and fruit, were heaped unsparingly; but intermingled with more solid fare. There had been much debate on the liquids to be supplied at those elder tables; the point, for a time, had puzzled both Mr. Owen and Joe Tanner.

"T'aint as the men moughtn't put up wi' teaslops," argued the latter; "particular when there's to be lady lass and wominfolk and bairns along wi' 'em. Tea's right and raysonable enough when such is there. Only it 'ud look as if we couldn't trust the chaps, or they themselves, to say 'let's have nowt stronger nor tea.'"

"There's something in that, Joe. Yet, somehow, that coarse, thick, ropy tavern beer seems out of place in your feast, I think. Ah! I have it now: do your men ever drink a drop of cider?"

"Well, good cider's not bad drink such warm evenin's this summer time"—

"Farmer Burge, at Hick's Hollow, has a famous cask, I know. With sugar, nutmeg, lemons, and a cucumber, I'll show you how to make a famous cider-cup. It's an old way we had at college, Tanner, I have not quite forgotten it."

Accordingly, bunches of green borage, with purplish-pink flowers, overtopped cool, clean china jorums on the tables, and seemed to make part of the floral deco-

rations which gave all so gay and graceful a character. The upper table was daintily set out, Mr. Tanner having improved his opportunities of acquaintance with the butler, to secure that its decking, in substance and sight, should be fit for the young lady's presence.

"Only mind ye, sir, we're boun' to pay for any vittles you provides now; we tak' nowt for nowt—all but borryin' o' glasses and siller spoons."

Close against the abruptly rising ground a circle had been marked out with posts and ropes, the first hidden by evergreens, the second by festoons of wild flowers, the handiwork of the school children. At one point in the ring a path led out—railed off in the same manner—along which lay five or six broad planks of deal, fresh planed and smooth. Along these Clara was to wheel the "baby-barrow" filled with the earth, which lay loosened to the stroke of the "pick fit for a fairy." That tool itself, and its companion spade, somewhat weighty for any but sturdy gnomes—a variety of the fairy race which would most readily present itself to the imagination of Blacksmith Bob—were none too much so for our well-grown, stately Clara. The most fastidious critic in iron work must have allowed that they were models of smith's craft. The wheel-barrow, too, was pronounced by keen judges to be as workmanlike, in shape and build, as any navvy's heart could wish; "light and handsome as any cabinet-maker could have turned out," added æsthetical enthusiasts. Even Joe Tanner, with his reminiscences of Grand "Joonction" ceremonies, did not regret the "moggany" nor the black handles. The absence of "scription" on an inch of silver, fretted him a little; but Mr. Owen's assurances that chances were in

favour of the subsequent addition of that monumental ornament by the fair presentee, went some way towards consoling him.

What a cheer the men gave as they saw Clara, on the old baronet's arm, come out by the path, among the tall feathering ferns, from under the deep shadows of the untouched oaks! Her dress, of some soft material, made admirable draping for her noble figure; the afternoon sunlight played so strongly on its severe, yet graceful folds, that though it were the summer season, there was nothing sombre about its rich brown tint. One knot of pink ribbon on her breast was her only ornament; a garden hat, with black lace at the brim, shaded her brow, without hiding the lustre of her deep blue eyes. The self-possession and dignity with which she returned the courtesy of the working men took nothing from the winsome cordiality of her salutation. She was not acting, consciously or unconsciously; yet her action was the perfection of that consummate art, which consists not in mere imitation of nature, but in adoption and correction of natural grace in motion. No tutoring could have given her that poetical union of dignity with winning grace; yet, no untutored person could have attained it. Her rough hosts perceived and admired, they knew not what; and paid their tribute in a second hearty cheer. The Maestro saw and admired with understanding; and, for the life of him, could not have kept from joining their loud salutation.

There was no want, either, of this stately winsome grace in the manner wherewith, in playful solemnity, she discharged her duties under the Yorkshire ganger's guidance, in breaking ground for the new tunnel.

"She's a bonny 'navvy,'" stuttered the man; "Yet a perfect lady," said the squire in undertone to the baronet.

Mr. and Mrs. Owen had outdone their own practised ingenuity in providing amusements for the children. So hearty was the ringing laughter of those clear young voices, so attractive the sight of their merriment, that even of the workmen, the great majority found amusement and pleasure enough in watching or assisting those childish sports.

Then followed the sharp, short, decisive onslaught, by the panting little ones, upon the cakes and cherries and mugs of sweet new milk. It was good for any man's heart to see with what shamefaced manly tenderness, some of the biggest-fisted, bushiest-whiskered of the "chaps" ministered to the wants of the tiniest and weakest of the guestlings then. I wish some painter could have put on canvas the grave by-play at "bob-cherry," between one "Hulking Ben," as he was known in the gang, and a plump toddling boy of the ripe age of three, whose convulsive sobs for temporary loss of "mammy" had moved that stalwart earth-worker to pity. Presently, like a flight of chaffinches, the children rose and took wing to the slope above, where soon they were chirruping and fluttering amongst the fern, and grass, and flowers. There were chubby fat darlings, too, rolling and tumbling in that waving verdure, more suggestive of baby porpoises than of unfledged chaffinches; but I don't feel sure of my simile, since young porpoises rarely roll and tumble in summer grass sloping from woody coverts.

Their joyous noises were a sort of music at the graver

banquet of the elders, sitting down with more steadfast, if not more vigorous, resolve to their share of the feast.

It was a nervous moment for the caterers, Mr. Owen and his friend Joe, when that experimental beverage, the cider-cup, was first poured into the mugs of the thirsty navvies. They eyed the drinkers as the captain of a company might eye his men at a crisis of battle, if not quite certain of their courage; or as an author might steal a look round the box corner at a public of doubtful temper, just as the weak point of his play was neared by the actors on the stage.

A wry face or two was made here and there down the tables; as here and there down the ranks a recruit or two might wince; or here and there down the stalls a sour critic or two might put on a sneer, ominous of a coming hiss.

Happily, the first mug emptied was that of "Hulking Ben," whose taste had been prepared—or vitiated—by the sweet juices of such occasional cherries as he had snapped in his game with the weeping toddler. His opinion was the first which found vent, spoken in what was meant for undertone, but heard at fifty yards:—

"Washy! but none so nasty; fust-rate for wimmen volk!"

Mr. Tanner's breath came again. Ben was a fashionable authority, not spite of, but in virtue of his "hulkiness." His opinion, thus expressed, would secure for the "cup" what the French call "a success of esteem if not of admiration."

Clara, Cousin Martha, and Mrs. Owen had a fair excuse for rising from their table before it was quite reasonable to expect the serious feasters to desist. They

went up the hill side to look after the children, and were soon dancing in rings and threading needles with long chains of happy little ones.

But, at last, even childhood's indefatigable powers of play began to flag, and it was proposed that some one should tell a story to the flushed and tired company, which gathered in one group upon the grass under the foot of a great oak-tree. There lay across it the trunk of a fallen comrade. On this the narrator sat, as on a throne, the eager audience at her feet. Little Mrs. Owen was a first-rate story-teller for children. The scholars of Wymerton knew this well, and entreated her to begin. Before she had quite finished her tale the hearers had increased imperceptibly, new-comers joining singly or by twos and threes, and sitting down silently among the children on the grass. Then came Clara's turn. She had once, for the delectation of Mrs. Owen's own children, half recited, half sung, in a version of her own, that oldest and most touching of nursery tales, the Babes in the Wood. Mrs. Owen insisted that she should succeed her on the rustic throne, and repeat the legend. What fitter time or place or audience?—with the leafy canopy of the grand old oak above her head, the tangled thickets of Wymerton woods behind, the purple shadows of evening just thinking to fall on them, and all those childish faces before her, upturned and expectant, smiling, yet wistful.

She had sung and said but some three or four verses, before the majority of the party had joined the original childish group around her. In her previous play she had first unfastened the strings of her hat, then taken it off altogether, and thrown it down beside her. The massive

shapely beauty of her well-poised head could thus be seen by all that looked on her: the calm white breadth of brow had nothing to conceal it. The soft richness of her heavy braided hair caught a golden halo from the up-slanting rays of the setting sun. The Maestro could not resist an impulse which moved him, to wreathe a crown of two leafy branchlets, plucked from the Druidical tree, and to place it gently upon her head. She smiled as she felt him do this, and shook it slightly, with motion worthy of a priestess, wrapped in a contemplation which might not be broken into. The fire and energy with which she told the conflict between the murderous-minded men, kept her hearers breathless. Some of the navvies, that had been lying or lounging on the grass, knelt up, and nailed their eyes on her. By a singular chance, as if every circumstance should be in keeping with her song, it happened, that as she told how the sweet babes laid down to sleep at evening in the wood, a little fair-haired girl who had crept nearer and nearer still, exhausted by play, and soothed into drowsiness by the mellow music of the singer's voice, dropped her little head on Clara's knee, and fell asleep—the golden ringlets showering into her lap. As she chanted with deep, pathetic, plaintive sweetness, the death-song of the injured innocents, and the charity of the redbreasted birds, you might have taken her—not for an inspired muse on Helicon; classic grace was not characteristic of the group in front;—but for some Runa-maid in the old sea-kings' time, charming the fierce, rude Northmen by the gentle penetrating power of rhymes.

That the women and children should sob aloud, was only what might have been expected. It was an un-

expected thing that more than one of the "navigator chaps" should be thought to have joined the chorus of their tears. Perhaps the shrewd suspicion of their having done so was false after all; but the asperity with which, next day, the notion was scouted, may seem to confirm its truth.

"Wish I could have the polishin' off o' them two rough uns," quoth Hulking Ben, uprising from the sward; "as to birdsnestin' o' robins, I've whopped a chap for it afore now, and, mayhap, shall do it agin!"

"Well, squire," said Sir Jeffrey, as they went homeward, arm in arm, through the wood, "what think you of such a scene as that?"

"Wonderful!" he answered; "those rough navvy fellows too. I couldn't have believed it! Orpheus taming the brutes in Ovid was nothing to it."

"I can't wonder," said Sir Jeffrey, "that the girl cleaves with enthusiasm to her art, when there is so genuine an artist soul in her. I fear the consciousness of so grand a power will make it hard to wean her from her career."

CHAPTER XXII.

MANCHESTER MEN. THE JUNCTION STATION.

"THE water in that tunnel at Wymerton seems likely to turn out troublesome, gentlemen," quoth the head man in their office at Manchester, to those magnates of the railway world, Messrs. Bright and Brassy.

"How so?" said those gentlemen.

"Did not Mr. Robertson, the chief engineer, give an eye to it last week, on his way down to the Northern lines? We wrote and told him."

"Oh yes! Mr. Robertson spent four-and-twenty hours down in the neighbourhood last week; looked up all the works completed on the branch line; and examined those at the tunnel carefully. There's a report from him in his letter this morning; that's what made me mention it. He says the common pumps we sent down first don't work at all. And if they did, they wouldn't be much use. It will want steam power as well as improved pumps to keep that water down. He says some one should be sent to superintend; some man with knowledge of hydraulics, with a head on his shoulders, and all the better if with hands and fingers at his arms' ends."

"Well! it's rather inconvenient, just now," said Mr. Brassy, "we've so much on hand. Mr. Symmons is away; Mr. Clark's on the Northern sections; Mr. Brownjohn down in Wales. Upon my word, I can't think who is to go."

"No!" said Mr. Bright. "But something must be done. They're cantankerous parties, the directors of that branch line—a local company who have the notion that contractors will cheat country squires; and are always eager to vindicate their business character with the shareholders, by exacting penalties and forfeits for delay. How soon does the contract bind us to deliver that Wymerton section, Mr. Saunders?"

"Somewhere about four months hence, or less," said the manager; "but I can refer;" and therewith opened a ponderous ledger on the office table.

"Let me see; W.—WYM. Yes! Wymerton, folio 46, section P. Ah! here I have it. What's to-day?" with an upward look at the almanack—"the twelfth; yes! Well, three months and five days to the exact date, gentlemen."

"No time to spare, then," returned Mr. Bright, "considering what remains to be done on the line. Confound that tunnel; what a bore it is."

"I wish we could bore it as thoroughly as it's likely to bore us," said Mr. Brassy, who had a feeble turn for humour. Mr. Saunders, the manager, laughed consumedly.

"It's very well laughing," again insisted Bright; "but paying forfeits for non-performance is no laughing matter; it's a sort of payment I hate as much in halfpence as in hundred-pound notes." After a pause,

he said again, "Who's that young man at Newton-forge, Mr. Saunders; could we trust him with the job? There's not much stirring down at Newton, is there? Is he engineer enough, think you?"

"The very man for it, sir," said Saunders confidently. "What a blockhead I was not to think of him! He's just what Robertson asks for—has a head on his shoulders; and was always a first-rate workman. You've found the right man for the right place this time, Mr. Bright. Now I come to think of it, I've a bundle of papers and drawings he sent in for my inspection and advice, three weeks ago; I believe they are plans for improvement in steam-pumping, too. Ay, that they are," he continued, as he drew out from his desk, and unrolled the sheets of drawing paper. "Pumps, by all that's coincident! I hadn't time to look them over; but I'll do so this very afternoon."

"Well, that you may do," said Mr. Bright; "but it's no use delaying if you think he's the man. Telegraph down to Newton, and tell him to come up by mail train to-night."

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"There's the algebra class at the Institute to provide for this evening," said Mark to Ingram, "as well as the little fellows on Sunday. I don't expect to be back by then; Mr. Saunders' telegraph warns me to bring a portmanteau." The modern "telegram," good reader, had not yet been excogitated; nor had that famous controversy concerning its legitimacy arisen as yet in the columns of the *Times*.

"Why, Travers here will take the *a plus b* fellows to-night for you," said Ingram, nodding at his friend

the college don and tutor from St. Sylvester's. "He can stay over Sunday, too, and help me with my duty as well as look after your class.; can't you, Travers?"

They were in Ingram's room, where the young men had taken a five o'clock dinner; the bread and cheese, which constituted the dessert, were on the table still.

"The '*a plus b* fellows,' to-night, by all means," answered the collegian; "but I don't feel so certain about staying over Sunday. I ought to be back in Oxford."

"Back in Jericho!" cried Ingram. "What, in the middle of the Long? It would tax your utmost ingenuity to frame an excuse for hurrying back to St. Sylvester's. Do you thing the one scout on the don's staircase, or the deserted cats which prowl along the cloister, safe from the terriers of undergraduates, can't spare you for a week or two? Nonsense! You stay here over Sunday, Master Travers, I can tell you; and over two or three Sundays more, for all I can promise yet. I have got accustomed to have Brandling living here, and couldn't bear to be left in the house alone. What's more, as one good turn deserves another, and you were a capital coach in books to me, when I was up at Oxford, I intend to repay the benefit. I'll show you something more of working parson's life than you could learn in college chapel. So make up your mind to stop in grimy Newton yet a bit. How long shall you be gone, Mark?"

"I haven't the least notion. Here's the extent of my information." And he read off from a slip of paper:—

"Saunders, Manch. to Brandling, Newton-forge.

Come up to-night, July 30; 9.15 express; bring portmanteau."

"I hope you won't be gone long for my sake, besides the '*a plus b* fellows' and Sunday scholars. Decidedly, Travers must stay and keep me company."

"Oh no! I take it, I must soon be back again. Though there's nothing special on hand down here just now, the regular work is no child's play, all those men and that material want looking up and over continually."

"What time is it?"

"Railway time, 7.25. Sit still a bit. You don't want yet to be packing up that important article of luggage, the portmanteau."

"Well, not exactly; but I have a case of instruments, colour-box, board, set of rulers, and such like, down in the committee drawers, at the Institute. I must step down and fetch them. I may be going engineering, and want them all."

"I commend your professional prudence, Mr. Brandling," said Ingram, with mock stateliness. "Travers had better go down with you, as the class meets at eight. I will stay here till you come back, and go with you to the station, if you like."

Arrived at Manchester, Mark was much pleased to hear, from Mr. Saunders, the nature of the work which lay before him. Not without becoming modesty, yet not without manifesting thorough conviction of the practical soundness of his theories, did he press upon the attention, first of that gentleman, and then of their common chiefs, the advantages of his plan for the pumping-engines. Messrs. Bright and Brassy did not feel confident enough in their own technical skill to decide at

once: they were great contractors, not great engineers. But his manner made upon their shrewd and experienced minds the most favourable impression.

"That young man will do, Saunders, depend upon it," they said to their first lieutenant; "you will be good enough to forward these drawings forthwith to Mr. Robertson. If he reports favourably—tell him to return them without delay,—the thing shall be tried. In the meanwhile, Brandling should go down and see how matters stand to-morrow."

This order Mr. Saunders intimated to Mark, who signified his readiness, but asked leave to read, or have read to him the original report of Mr. Robertson's own visit to the works. There were other and confidential matters in the letter—parliamentary prospects of projected competing lines, hints as to supposed solvency or insolvency of other contracting firms, and predictions of the fortunes of divers sorts of railway-stock—so that the cautious Mr. Saunders contented himself with reading to the young man such portions as referred to the watery mischief in the tunnel.

"Well, I think I understand the case pretty well now, sir; but you have not told me, that I remember, exactly where this troublesome tunnel is; I know it's on the Skillingford line somewhere."

"Oh! ah! to be sure; how were you to make your way there without some precise directions? Wymerton's the name of the village."

"Wymerton!" said Mark, with a flush of surprise. "What? near Wymerton-place, near old Sir Jeffrey Wymer's property?"

"Just so, to be sure, the line runs through a part of

the old gentleman's park. Do you know the place at all?"

"Only by name. Good afternoon, sir." And out hurried Mark, by no means anxious to let Mr. Saunders speculate upon the causes of the emotion which seized on him at the name of Wymerton. In his frank intercourse with Clara Jerningham, and cousin Martha, Wymerton-place, and woods, and mere, had all been household words. All reminiscences of Clara's girlhood, all thoughts and feeling of home were inextricably blended with the name of the dear old place; and for one who loved her to the inmost fibre of his deep heart, that unknown Wymerton was enchanted ground.

What a wearisome afternoon he should have in Manchester! How much better to spend the hours at least on the way there! The night train would get him into the neighbourhood by daylight; he might see the golden sunrise gleam upon that mirror of the mere at Wymerton, whose waters had often reflected her image! He walked back to the office. Mr. Saunders was still there.

"Oh! by all means, the sooner the better; it would be certainly one clear day gained if you could be down at Wymerton to-morrow morning. I had not thought of the night train, because you had a long rattle up from Newton yesterday; but if you are not tired, and wish it, by all means go."

"You made a good hit in remembering that young Brandling, Mr. Bright," said Saunders, to his chief, some hour or two after Mark's second departure from the office. "Young man that puts his heart into what he does, sir. Only think of his calling again to suggest

that he might get down to Skillingford by the night train, and thence on to Wymerton."

Certainly Mark, in this instance *had* put his heart into what he was doing. Not perhaps in that sense, exactly, which appeared to Mr. Saunders. But Mark was fated not to gain his first impression of Wymerton-mere by the morning sunshine. His impatience, even had it been known to the stony-hearted directors of the two independent lines of rail by which he was to reach Skillingford, would scarcely have moved them from their determination to gratify, at the expense of an unoffending, much enduring, public, the private animosity entertained against each other by their respective boards.

The veracious, if intricate, Bradshaw, assured those ingenious persons who could make head or tail of his pages, more puzzling to vulgar brains than a table of logarithms, that by leaving Manchester at 7.15, P.M. they might——

"Yes! let me see, up-line, page twenty-three, column A. No, that's a down train! Ah, here, within the brackets! No! opposite page, section z, 13, below the break there. Yes!"—they might hope to reach Rumbleham junction by 1.26, A.M.; thence, upon shifting their persons and luggage across a platform, and migrating into the domains of another company, they might hope by 5.17 to be delivered at Skillingford. But these hopes were based upon the theory of coincidence at Rumbleham of two separate and independent trains, due there at the untimely hour of 1.26, A.M.;—and some little interruption of good feeling between the boards of the two companies having occurred since the last monthly impression of Bradshaw, such hopes were, for the pre-

sent, doomed to daily disappointment. The directors of the line on which the Skillingford station is situated could imagine no more ingenious and gratifying device for irritating, humiliating, and confounding the other obnoxious board, than issuing injunctions to the guards and drivers of their trains not to enter the platform shed at Rumbleham until the whistle of the inimical company's train should be heard, announcing its arrival upon the sharp curve near that station; and then so to manage, by dint of energy and promptitude, as to discharge goods or passengers, and whisk, screeching, off again before it were possible for the station-master, guards, and porters of the other side, with all the goodwill in the world, to have accomplished the platform transit. With such zeal and sympathy did the servants of the board enter into the views and feelings of their directors that certain little unforeseen incidents had grown of it, by no means pleasing to the main body of the shareholders, who at the next general meeting had the bad taste to attack the directors for them, with "ignorant and unjustifiable abuse,"—so at least the chairman designated it, in his spirited reply to their spokesman. Such, for example, was that display of "energy" in rapid unloading of goods, which caused the smash of china worth two hundred and fifty pounds, belonging to Messrs. Tippotts and Sorcers, who obtained, before a jury, full damages with costs. Such again was that result of "promptitude" in starting the train, which led to the accident, wherein Mr. Wirey Screwe, the eminent Chancery barrister, broke the tibia of his left leg, a matter which was "amicably" compromised at cost of a compensation, the amount of which I am afraid to set down here.

No such exciting incidents enlivened the small hours of that particular night on which Mark Brandling betook himself from Manchester to Skillingford by the 7.15, P.M. All that happened was, that, in spite of the Manchester train having hushed its whistle and driven slap round the dangerous curve into the station, at awful risk to life and limb, the energetic promptitude of their watchful and ingenious enemies contrived to frustrate the gallant attempt. At 1.28, A.M., Mark found himself on the hostile platform, in company of his portmanteau, gazing wistfully down the long, straight four-mile vista, where the glowering red light behind the train in rapid motion was dying by diminution out of sight.

No other passenger had crossed the platform. As the great feat of the night was successfully performed, the station-master, policeman, and porters at once retired to their domiciles and to restorative slumbers, leaving only one of the latter body in charge of the station-house, to check the time of passage of the 3.50 goods' train, by which, if so minded, Brandling might perhaps get on to Skillingford. There are some men whose conversational incapacity becomes the more confirmed, as well as the more evident, by any attempt made on the part of others to overcome it. Of this class was the estimable, broad-shouldered man, in green velveteens wrought with red worsted, upon whose social acquirements Mark found himself cast for diversion during the next two weary hours and more. After eliciting a certain number of ahs and ohs, yes and noes, by skilful and urgent questioning, it became painfully apparent that nothing farther was to be extracted from what may have been, after all, the deep treasury of his thoughts and fancies.

So, after diligent perusal of a last month's time-table; of a placard proclaiming what forty-shilling woes had overtaken some hardened criminal, who, with a third-class ticket, had appeared, in defiance to all human law and equity, in a second-class carriage at Rumbleham junction; of an exhortation addressed to agriculturists, urging upon them the virtues of Jones's incomparable cough pills for pigs; lastly, of an advertisement, with wood-cuts, concerning the matchless fit of the celebrated fourteen-shilling trousers—Mark had nothing left for it but to seat himself on his portmanteau out of the chill night air in the booking office, and contrast the regular heavy tick of the railway clock with the fitful sputter of the water in the gas-pipe, on the batswing of which his eyes were fixed with vacant gaze.

The prospect of a seven or eight hours' journey in a goods' train, is not in itself, under most circumstances, enlivening, nor does embarkation thereon usually confer a sense of relief. Yet Mark jumped up in ecstacy from his seat when the premonitory whistle roused the uncommunicative and nodding porter. There chanced to be a couple of empty carriages sent down with the goods' trucks by this train, being in want of painting or repairs; in one of these he ensconced himself delightedly, and was soon again on his way to Skillingford.

On his way, indeed, but at far other rate of speed than in that mail train wherein he had hoped to make his journey. No blush of sunrise should he see reflected upon the surface of the still mere at Wymerton; not an hour, nor five short minutes, could he give to the play of fancy, on first treading the enchanted ground. An immediate introduction to Joe Tanner and his men, with

moist and sloppy investigations in a dark tunnel, not a little dangerous by reason of slips and crumblings, were the sterner realities which awaited him. He must spend what might yet be saved of the forenoon in accurate and minute inspection of the deficient engines and the general aspect of the works—the whole afternoon in digesting a report, of which the evening post must convey a copy to Mr. Saunders. Provoking all this, yet not displeasing, on the whole, to the temper of such a mind as Mark's. Postponing anticipated pleasure to immediate discharge of duty, was neither an unaccustomed nor a painful thing to him. Mr. Saunders may have been accidentally mistaken on this one occasion as to the sense in which "the young man put his heart into what he did;" but essentially his estimate of Brandling's character was just and true. There was a superintendent at the tunnel, of somewhat superior education and rank to the Yorkshireman; both he and the latter worthy were, within a couple of hours from Mark's arrival, thoroughly satisfied with the new chief sent down to them, convinced of his intelligence, decision, and skill, and won over by his frank and manly heartiness. "I must say as he behaved like a gentleman to me, sir," quoth the superintendent to Mr. Owen, whom he met in the village at dinner time—an honourable testimony from one whose little authority was, of course, superseded by that of the new-comer.

"Nowt o' your finicking fine gentleman ways aboot 'un," was the seemingly contradictory eulogy bestowed upon him by Tanner, in conversation on the same topic with his mates. "It's off coat, and oop shirt sleeves wi' 'un workman-like: and a tidy arm too, when sleeves *be*

oop; as if he'd handled pick or hammer, or summat hisself afore."

Neither the superintendent nor Joe Tanner were capable of pronouncing judgment upon Mark's scheme for modifying the structure of the engines and pumping apparatus; but both had wit to perceive that his practical knowledge of machinery made him comprehend at a glance, more thoroughly than they themselves, the faults and deficiencies of those which had been tried. His announcement that steam power would be required to cope with the difficulty was especially gratifying to Joe Tanner's self-esteem, as it confirmed the opinion he had confided to Sir Jeffrey, before Clara, with the maple-handled tools, had given the first stroke of pick to the new tunnel.

There was no inn in Wymerton; the village itself being too small, and until these latter railway times, too remote from any great highway to support one. Skillingford, a more considerable place, with a neat new railway hotel, was four miles distant; too far off for a man who must be close upon his work every day. But the superintendent, conciliated by Mark's behaviour, had solved the difficulty by the time he returned from dinner and from meeting Mr. Owen. There was a dairy farmhouse with ivy-clad gables and rose-trellised front, amidst the meadows, between the rectory and the river, where sleek kine stood dewlap-deep in water, under shade of pollard willows, at noontide of summer days. That house had under its thatched roof, a spare bedroom, the dazzling whiteness of whose bed furniture and window curtains could not be shamed by the snowy puff-balls of guelder-rose which brushed against the

lattice. Down stairs was a little parlour, kept with corresponding trimness and care, scented by mignonette under the window-sill outside. Friends of Parson Owen, whom the rectory could not accommodate, had sometimes been favoured occupants of so desirable a lodging. Upon understanding that the rector gave a general joint guarantee with the superintendent, for the respectability of the engineering gentleman, Mark might, if he so pleased, enjoy the privilege of becoming lodger there a while. If his first day's work were hard, it was not overlong: the post left Wymerton by five, and his first report to Manchester had to be finished by that hour. He contrived, moreover, to find time for a few lines to Ingram, at Newton-forge, acquainting him with his present residence and occupation. He had work before him—he wrote—for several weeks, and begged him to send requisites for so prolonged an absence. Chiefly he desired him to pack, most carefully, in such and such a box, expressly made for it, which he would find on such and such a shelf, the most precious of his possessions, the framed lithograph which had been given him at Venice, by his friend Rosina.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAIRY-LAND.

The wearisome night-journey, the hard day's work, could bring no sense of fatigue to Mark Brandling here at Wymerton. . Had he possessed other than his own vigorous frame, inured to patient, energetic toil, the eagerness and impatience of the mind within would not have allowed such sense to master him. This self-same evening must he wander by Wymerton-mere, and through Wymerton woods; look upon the old house at Wymerton-place, and discover the cottage where Willie Jerningham's fatherly tenderness had sought to compensate for a lost mother's love to his motherless child.

There was a summer's evening yet before him, a mellow golden sunset, and a lengthened twilight, soft with summer breeze. He crossed the meadows from the dairy-farm, towards the corner where their expanse narrowed between the river and the foot of the hill, which parted the mere from the glade where the rail-road cut through Dame Alice's oaks. The luxuriant grass, laid up for "after-math," closed knee deep

over the path. There was sufficient undulation on its surface to give the notion of a liquid plain; and over it the swallows, skimming close, with glossy backs beneath the line of sight, seemed finny creatures gliding in water, rather than birds winging their way in air. By-and-by the path met the hill-slope, where a hawthorn hedge drew the boundary of meadow land. Short turf, patched with moss, and brightened with coronellas, succeeded the long grass. Higher up, by the park palings, ferns straggled out of the woodland, and tall stems of foxglove hung up daintily rows of pink fairy bells. A stile, with oaken hand-rail, carried the path over the deer fence into a leafy avenue of the cool dark woods. Sometimes the hazel bushes, barred, as well as overarched the way: Mark moving aside the branches could hear scud and scuffle of hare or rabbit startled in the underwood, or pipe and whistle of thrush and blackbird scared from early roost.

Elsewhere an ample space was left, round spreading beech, or feathering ash, or well-grown oak. The hinds of fallow deer would stand a moment, looking coy curiosity out of their great soft eyes, bridling their graceful heads with momentary indignation, and then wildly timid, bounding into covert. Again the hazel bushes would close across the pathway facing westward; the thicker tufts of foliage showing dark patterns, inlaid on gold; whilst single leaves, hung broadwise across the glowing sky, transmitted tinted light through every delicate membrane, as through a quarry of cathedral glass. At last a vista opened on a belt of grass fringed by a deep border of solemn bulrushes, beyond which lay

outstretched, sheltered even from such breath of wind as set the meadows waving, the calm, wide sheet of Wymerton mere.

There was too much colour in the vaulted sky for its waters to look cold or stern: as a faithful mirror they reflected the warm summer evening's beauty that bent over them. Long tongues of land stretched out from the banks; and upon islands here and there, clustered masses of dark foliage, alders and witch-elms, abeles and poplars, aspens, and occasional willows. Under these the shadows lay deep and strong. Now and then the wild fowl, returning to the rushes, would plump down, breast onwards, sending a spray and ripple of sunlit water to infringe upon the gloom.

Minuter and less obvious circumstances are often they which set imagination or memory to work most busily. Neither the broad stretch of the lake itself had brought back to Mark remembrance of the outspread Garda, nor had the low, blue distance suggested absence of the grand Alpine background. But the wind's breath in the tree-tops, as he looked upwards, stirring the silvery underleaf of alder and aspen, reminded him how the olive shows its grey lining as the breeze whispers by; and the churr of a goshawk, passing on noiseless wing, brought back into his ear the trill of the cicadas that haunt the olive grove.

By a lakeside he had first seen Clara Jerningham. He called to mind each trivial circumstance cementing their acquaintance in the first few days spent together at the little Italian inn. He wondered at his passing through them without apprehending how they were to

mould his character and coming life. He marvelled at his failing to discern what influence had mastered him. Perhaps, it was that all had been so frank, open, and unreserved. She had assured him of her friendship: and he, like a fool, had debated in himself, whether so *much* as friendship were possible between them. So *much* forsooth, as if she could ever be to him so *little* as a friend! Unconscious hypocrite! He had deceived himself and her: else she had never given him that well-remembered trustful look with which she winged the words: "we part friends, as brother and sister."

She meant a brotherhood of work and aspiration. Their talk was of self-culture, of energetic action, and of persevering progress. But progress whither? That was the question on answering of which it hung, whether such talk had not been worse than vain.

They were both children of "the people:" so they both had said. Neither had been ashamed of such worthy origin. Good! If "not being ashamed" did not imply, in truth, a pride of birth, which for ready contempt and hatred might vie with that of the most supercilious noble. He remembered how he himself had plucked an olive branch, and then had wondered wherefore his hand held emblem of peace, whereas his heart within was brooding war.

Holy war or unholy?

Great had been the changes wrought in him since that day: but he could still answer, as by the lake side,—

"Holy war."

Yes; but in those days he would have desecrated,

thinking to consecrate, the cause. He would have waged holy war with unholy weapons.

Against oppression, against social injustice, against all that depresses and degrades the class whence he sprung was he minded to make war then: he was no less minded to make it now. Such was, is, shall be, holy war. He would even now condemn his own self falsely should he unworthily despise the hot enthusiasm which fired him then. He had wished to be a leader of his fellows; but not as a mere demagogue; not as an agitator moving water with sturdy strokes, only to keep afloat on top. His impulse had been, so far, as a weak, erring man's may be—unselfish, generous, and brotherly. Nevertheless, it had been blind. He had misconstrued the motives of men in other social classes, had belied their character. Hate and violence were the unholy weapons he had been so ready to wield; as if in righteous conflict true victories were to be won with such! His social theory had been so narrow-minded, so short-sighted, that he was amazed now to think how it had ever satisfied his understanding and his heart.

Yes! In that little Italian inn by the lakeside he had also chanced upon the man whom he now felt to have been one of his life's best instructors. It was Ingram who had lent him the newspaper with that account of the rioting which agitated him so strangely. Ingram was the man, from whose intimacy, whose conversation, whose quiet, forcible example he had been learning lessons of such political lore as newspapers too little heed. From him he had learned the depth of that teaching which tells of a true commonwealth underlying all human society—grounded upon no arbitrary

compact, built upon no mere theory, but rooted in the essential relationship of men to a Head over all men, himself no less human than divine.

That there was something which bound up Ingram's friendship with his own love for Clara Jerningham, Mark could not but recognise instinctively. The time of his first meeting with either had been almost coincident. The circumstance of their common acquaintance with her at Venice had served to cement their intimacy; but he little knew what effect on his friend's inclination for him, on his earnest longing to develop his character into all worth, and truth, and good, had been wrought by the very circumstance which would have estranged from him utterly a spirit less admirably tempered than that of the young clergyman.

Ingram's power and polish of intellect had been happy ingredients in the influence he had exercised upon Mark. Any sense of superiority in these over a friend of collegiate training and clerical profession, might have been a snare to a self-taught, self-raising, mind such as Brandling's. Perhaps, the love which had softened his character might have introduced a readier humility. Such effect is not uncommon. But familiar contact with a weaker intellect than his own might have provoked a latent arrogance, and thus have rendered harder the task of winning him to recognise and to appreciate the moral nobility and spiritual pre-eminence of his friend. Again, it was a happy thing for Mark, that he from whom he was to acquire conviction and appreciation of a living love deeper, purer, higher, more enduring than earth's best and tenderest, should have been one in whose own breast human affection had stirred so profound a depth.

Mark knew not the true source of Ingram's sympathetic understanding of his own heart's tenderness, yet the influence of that sympathy was powerful and winsome; it supplied an instinct, whereby the task of guiding Mark to higher ground became easier to his friend. And now in truth he did stand upon higher ground, and could look with clearer moral eyesight into the outspread distances of his own life—and her's.

"Butterflies flutter," he had said, "grubs spin;" contrasting carelessly the downright labour to which his life was wedded, with what he took to be the giddy life of his new, beautiful, and bright acquaintance. His after-knowledge of her studious toil at Venice had taught him the injustice, in one respect, of his hasty estimate. But the growth of passion had kept him from sifting thoroughly the chaff from the wheat of his appreciation. To her, such as she was, his heart had become subject. Then had come passion to encounter passion. As iron which fire softens, is yet through fire hardened into steel, so his judgment, softened by fire of love, was steeled by fire of jealousy.

But after all it is not given to a mean passion to teach noblest lessons. Mark's indignation had burnt fierce within him at the intrusive admiration of the Venetians' loud farewell; but not till holier inward fires had purified his love for Clara, could he judge truly the false position, into which enthusiasm and a headstrong will had thrust her.

He would try now to reason without thought of self concerning her. What if she never should be any more to him than she was now? What if no personal sense of grudging should make him still resent intrusive

admiration or impertinent homage offered to what should be her shrinking womanhood? Without regard to him or to his own hopes, was that artist-life in truth worthy of her? They had spoken of self-culture by the Italian lake-side. Well! she had been diligent in a culture, which, if not of the highest, was yet by no means of despicable or unworthy kind. They had talked of energetic action; herein she had not been remiss. They had talked of persevering progress: ay, but whither did her progress tend? He understood now for himself, and could not fail to understand for her as well, that mere development of gifts and powers, without determination of their use towards some truly noble end, cannot and does not constitute sufficient purpose for a human life. He asked himself if that were not most awful of frivolities, which thus left truly purposeless, an earnest, toilsome, disciplined, aspiring heart and mind. For she had noble qualities, to whom his love was given. Herein, his judgment had not been purblind. Courageous, generous, of open heart and hand, impatient of baseness, scorning intrigue, quick and warm in sympathy for kindly natures and for lofty characters, what manner of companion might she not prove in such a path as he desired now to tread! what manner of fellow-worker, in such work as he should hope to do hereafter! Surely, reader, who beginnest now to smile at the young man's inconsistency, his offence is not unpardonable. I grant you, his design—to ask himself, whether, indeed, the artist-life were worthy of his heart's queen and darling, without regard, forsooth, to himself or to his own hopes—has failed in part, and he has fallen back to questions of companionship for life and work between

himself and her. But, you see, the spell was strong upon him, the witchery of those dear imaginings, that will not trace out on the dim plain of the future, more than one course for the running of two life-streams. A spell and witchery! yes! some such were upon him, as he sat musing there, watching the round red sun sink down below the level of the mere! His was what men would call a positive rather than an imaginative mind; yet it must not be supposed that, being such as I have tried to picture him, he could be destitute of imaginative power, or that such power lay dormant in him. A mathematician, how could he in its absence or abeyance have pushed his knowledge far? A mechanical inventor, how could he have given the promise now beginning to be realised, had he not put in exercise that wondrous forecasting faculty which foresees unachieved results accomplished by application of means as yet untried? A working man rising into leadership of work, how could he, without true poetic power,* have accomplished the change in his own condition, for which opportunity was given indeed by circumstances out of his control, but to meet which he had with patience, and perfect intelligence, trained himself long before?

No! Mark could not be said to be a man of no imagination; but that power in him had been directed to things practical and positive, to objects in pursuit and acquisition of which, fact and experience would continually administer inevitable correctives to its vagaries. He was not a man likely to yield without a struggle to some purely fantastic trickery of imagination.

* Ποιητικὴ δύναμις.

But as he sat there, facing the mere, he did seem to himself to have become, upon a sudden, the sport of some unaccountable delusion.

There was a sweet, wild ballad tune, which more than once he had heard Clara sing, as they came homewards across the lagoon, in those early nights of their Venetian intimacy, when Digby delighted to stay the plash of his oar and listen to her music.

Now, that the rhythm of this peculiar song should seem, through the silence, to thrill in his ear, as he recalled her image and let it mingle in his aspirations, was in truth no matter for marvel.

But what startled him was the clear, distinct, individual character of the notes, which now carried this rhythmical music in upon his sense of hearing. What conceivable force of reminiscence could thus fill it with the rich, inimitable, peculiar harmonies of Clara's voice?

He stood up, thinking to dispel the trickery of his fancy; but rising thus above the level of the bulrushes and shrubs by the water's edge, it seemed to him that the sound grew more distinct, and loud, and full. He sat down again, half angry with himself for not being able to shake off the delusion, half fearful lest it should vanish and rob him of its sweetness.

Deep and tender, articulate and silvery, the voice was travelling nearer to him and nearer. He could distinguish the very words, and on the very words the very emphasis, which Clara's own voice alone could give.

It was purple twilight now; the last burnished point of the glowing sun-rim was quenched utterly in the still sheet of the mere. A heron rose with noiseless flight from behind a screen of dark rushes, so ëerie and ghost-

like that it was a wonder to see. Mark could sit still no longer. He stood up again, under influence of an undefinable emotion, and walked rapidly forward in the direction of the sound. The pathway took a bend: and then in front of him he saw, or seemed to see, a figure in a soft brown dress, whose hands were busy with some leaf or flower; over the arm hung by its ribbons a garden hat. How should he believe his eyes?

She stopped—surprised, not fearful, at finding some one suddenly across her path.

The motion and the stillness were hers, hers only—it must be she.

He was too deeply moved for any formal speech:

"Clara! oh, dearest Clara! It must, indeed, be you."

"Yes, sir! My name is Clara—but yours?"

Ah! she saw him now; and, as if the icy ebb of feeling, which cousin Martha's ominous words had sent chilly to her heart, had turned then, for the first time, into a full warm flow of joy, she came forward, both hands outstretched, to greet him.

"Dear Mark, thank Heaven you are safe and well!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROSINA'S GIFT REGIVEN.

THUS then had a word been spoken, on either side, which might be reckoned to seal a bond of union between them two. "Dearest Clara!" answered by "Dear Mark!"

Either had heard the other distinctly; had noted the word and its tone of utterance; but there was yet a wide difference between the manner in which one or other could discern and interpret its true meaning.

That meaning was not for immediate analysis and resolution.

Therefore, after the instantaneous emotion of first greeting, they fell again into the old friendly habit, and went side by side up to Wymerton House, discoursing of the strange chance which had brought them there together, much as they might have done had this been one of their familiar meetings on the Lido, when the Oxonians were also by, and the Maestro, and good cousin Martha.

Her surprise was excessive at seeing Mark, and her joy, if not more significant in its expression than Clara's, was certainly more demonstrative. Her unreserved

inquisitiveness, importunate in any one of less kindly simplicity, at all events gave Mark opportunity to speak of his altered circumstances and prospects, as otherwise he neither could nor would have done. Not even the change in his dress was suffered to remain unaccounted for; and his honest answers to her blundering questions, even on such a matter, gave evidence of the young man's sincerity of character. As a mechanic he had honoured his calling with a fastidious minuteness of observance, and even in dress had taken scrupulous care to show no shame at his own social rank.

But he was a mechanic now no longer; and had rightly judged that to keep any outward characteristic of a mechanic's calling would be mere affectation, nay, something less pardonable. "To be what he seemed, to seem what he was," had been Mark's early motto—not one a man of worth would change even in trifles.

By-and-by Sir Jeffrey came in, and the story of the unexpected meeting must again be gone through by cousin Martha, with much volubility, and ever-recurring exclamations of astonishment.

"Only think, Sir Jeffrey, the tunnel brought him here! Tanner's tunnel; our tunnel; Clara's own tunnel! Little did I fancy she was fetching Mark here when she went to the navvies' party to wheel the baby barrow."

"It is quite certain," said the old baronet with a smile at her eagerness, "that Clara has brought your good friend Mr. Brandling here. If the rail had not cut through Dame Alice's oaks it would not have come to the hill-side. If the rail had not come to the hill-side there would have been no tunnel to bore through.

And if the tunnel had not threatened to drown Tanner's men, and swamp the contractor's profits, Mr. Brandling would not have come to rescue us from water, as he rescued cousin Martha from fire. Clara's decision brought the rail through the oaks; so, as you say, she, beyond a doubt, has done us the pleasure of bringing Mr. Brandling here. What can I do but welcome him as her invited guest, and beg, that in token of feeling himself under a friend's roof, he will do me the honour to stay and sup here this evening."

Little did Sir Jeffrey think what quickened pulse the logic of his pleasantry was causing in the hearts of his young hearers. Will they seem very childish to my readers if I declare that this chain of consequences appeared to both, a thing of more significance than he was laughingly suggesting?

The happy hours of that evening passed too soon, and sent Mark home still under spell of that strange witchery which came upon him at sunset by the mere. What had befallen him still wore an incredible aspect. He had heard her, seen her, spoken with her, felt her hand in his. Yes! he had seen her. No fooling of the fancy this. But what of the strange joy which gleamed under, not out of, the blue depth of her eyes, as phosphorescent glories through calm sea-deeps?

Had he seen that in truth, or only seemed to see?

Yes! he had heard her. And the sound of one word, never yet coupled with his name, was it not fraught with special harmony of tenderness?

Yes! he had spoken to her: spoken whilst doubting of her presence; spoken out, with a false courage, that word which, dwelling ever in his deepest heart, was

farthest ever from the gate of utterance when she was near.

Could she have heard distinctly by what name he called her; and could it be that the word spoken in return was one of pardon for the involuntary boldness?

Clara, on her side, was pondering also the meaning of what had passed between them, using other weights for balance of conviction. Mark's inmost mind was no true secret for her. If, spite of his devotion, his self-control had kept him from betraying it at Venice; or if the engrossing enthusiasm of her own mind in pursuit of artistic excellence had kept her from discerning its involuntary betrayal,—all that had ended with her last visit to the queen city of the Adriatic, and the confidences of the sorrowful Rosina. She did not indeed precisely know what had given him courage to speak out so freely, calling her by name his dearest; but she guessed with tolerable certainty that he had spoken in something like unconsciousness of her actual presence.

But she herself had spoken: had spoken a word, the full import of which was not yet clear to her own self. What might it have seemed to him? She was quite sure he would ask himself for an interpretation. She was not quite sure that he would not ask that interpretation of her. Now Clara's heart, no less than that of the man who loved her, was honest and sincere. She had a genuine soul, actress as she was. As an artist she had simulated the outward aspects of affection: as a woman, she had never once for a moment trifled with affection itself. She had indeed chosen a career that is,

what Mark misdoubted it to be, an awful frivolity, purposeless, unworthy a true woman's heart; but in one large sense, she had not herself become frivolous therein. She scarcely knew, now, whether to regret her utterance of the one word on which Mark might question her; but should he do so, she would use no subterfuge or concealment, nor put him off with playful mockery of explanation. Such conduct she held unworthy of herself, and had a secret glow of satisfaction in holding it unworthy of him also. Still the difficulty stared her in the face. She would give no other than an honest answer; but did she know what answer would be honest indeed?

Had Mark's busiest days come at once upon him after that first evening, both of them might have been saved considerable embarrassment. They would have seen but little of each other, and have gained time to determine within themselves on what footing it were best to place, if possible, their renewed acquaintance. But the machinery, for which he had sent to Manchester, could not be forwarded at once, and the selection of a site for the engine-house, with a design for its rough construction, made no large demands upon his time. Of this cousin Martha became at once aware, and nothing appeared to her more natural, than to ask "that dear good Mark" continually to acccompany herself and Clara in walks or drives in the picturesque neighbourhood of Wymerton. Old Sir Jeffrey, too, was quick to note the intelligence, power, and originality of Mark's conversation. Free from the social prejudices which often make men of his station keep men of Mark's at arm's length, he not only gave him a general

invitation to the house, but would urge a particular acceptance of it on almost every succeeding day. So it came to pass that for the first weeks of Mark's residence at Wymerton he found himself daily in company of Clara, as nearly as possible upon the terms of their old Venetian intimacy, which, once delightful, was now becoming intolerable to his impatience. Every day tormented him with growing anxiety to be certified upon the doubtful point of her true feeling for him, and yet appeared to put farther off a fair and just occasion of seeking some acknowledgment that, in the first moment of their meeting, they had stood nearer to each other than mere friends. Clara's position at Wymerton seemed also to increase that distance between them, which, in curious contradiction, the manly modesty of a lover's heart will often place between itself and her to whom its affection is drawing nearer and yet more near. In Italy, where he had seen her famous and admired, his heart would sometimes be bold to tell him that its own affection and esteem were nobler crowns to offer for womanly acceptance than those of admiration or of fame. But here at Wymerton, the artist was lost in the woman; he saw her filling, as it were, the place of house-daughter, looked on and loved as such by those who had known her from girlhood. Affection and esteem, of older date than his, were in her glad and full possession; he felt new diffidence and fresh misgivings. She seemed so rich in store of love, so far removed, in this quiet home-life, from the glittering isolation to which a crowded artist-life seemed to condemn her, that he was more than ever tempted to say despondingly, "What worth can my heart's best

devotion have for her?" Even the brotherly and sisterly feeling of which she had spoken at Sermione, which could exist and had existed between fellow-toilers and fellow-strugglers in art and craft,—even that, which but the other day he was scorning as insufficient, was beginning now to wane and fade away—and he therewith to regret and long for it again.

Clara herself, with her resolute, sustained impetuosity, found the reserve that was insensibly growing between them irksome and disagreeable: the more so because she knew it to be fictitious, and because, so far as yet, knew the fictitious element in her life had not crept out of its appointed space to intermeddle with what lay beyond. She felt that the old friendliness of manner between herself and Mark, which once might have been honest enough, was now but a mask and a stage costume; and she was the last woman in the world to bear with acting off the stage.

She saw the constraint which Mark was putting on himself, and knowing his inmost mind, knew that it was serving no real and good purpose. His constraint imposed constraint on her; and though it was satisfactory to gain time for self-testing, delay of encounter, when any crisis was at hand, was repugnant to the temper of a spirit such as her's.

Cousin Martha's indiscretion interfered at last, in the simplest manner possible, to ease the strain and bring about an explanation.

Some portion of the machinery had arrived. The remainder would, in all probability, reach Wymerton by the morrow or the following day. Mark was looking

forward, not without pleasurable excitement, to harder and more continuous work. Sir Jeffrey had been down at the tunnel in the morning, had seen the great rough packing-cases, and had been told by Mark what increased demand would thenceforth be made upon his time. With his usual forward hospitality he had insisted that Mark, less likely in future to accept his invitations, should not fail to dine that day and spend the evening at the House.

"Come up early, Mr. Brandling, and have a turn before dinner on the terraces; it may be some time before you can walk there so leisurely again."

Accordingly, there was no deep declination of the sun's course that afternoon, when Mark returned from the works to his lodging at the dairy-farm, dressed himself, and was on the point of setting out for the path in the woodlands.

But, as it had chanced, some call of business had prevented the worthy baronet from returning to the House that morning after giving his invitation; neither Clara nor cousin Martha had been made aware of it; nor, by consequence, of any reason for being earlier than usual that afternoon upon the garden terraces.

They had been over to Wymerton to call on Mrs. Owen at the Rectory, to look in at the school, and to visit some old crone whom the warm summer time could not deliver from perpetual rheumatics; when it occurred to cousin Martha that they might cross the meadows to the dairy farm, and carry home in her inevitable basket some of those tiny, snowy, new-laid bantam eggs which she chose to consider superior to any that

appeared in the regular way on the breakfast table at Sir Jeffrey's. When Mark passed through the gate in the garden-hedge of the farmhouse he met them coming from the meadows; and turned back with them. Of course he must ask them into the parlour, which served him as sitting-room and study. On the tables lay drawing-boards, plans, and mathematical instruments. These at once attracted cousin Martha's curiosity: she was soon up from her seat, examining, handling, inquiring, and admiring.

"I always thought in Italy, Mark, you were too learned for a man in fustian; but I had no notion you could use such things as these. Are all these drawings yours, now? These wonderful little wheels, and steam-boilers cut in half, and insides of pumps? Why are some on nice, white paper, some on flimsy stuff which looks as if oil were spilt on it? What is this ruler like a T, and this triangle with a little round hole here? And what can you want with so many pairs of compasses?"

So she went on, passing from one thing to another, with perpetual questionings. Clara sat, with her back to the light, on a settle under the open window, outside of which sweet-scented flowers grew. She kept her hands folded in her lap, and watched with kindly smile Mark's patience in satisfying her cousin's inquiries, at which he neither seemed to wonder nor be vexed. Had she felt any sort of strangeness with him, she might herself have been ashamed and fretful at her cousin's importunities. But the kindly smile upon her countenance gained yet a kindlier sweetness at the thought that Mark knew, as well as she did, cousin

Martha's real worth and goodness; and that he must also acknowledge, in his heart, relationship with her whom he had rescued from death so bravely.

In the pursuit of cousin Martha's investigations, something, at last, went wrong; Mark endeavoured to let a question pass without an answer, turning aside as if affecting not to hear it. On a side-table lay a flat case of rosewood with double-folding cover, fastened by a little patent lock. It might have been some eighteen inches square, and three in depth. Cousin Martha had pounced on it.

"Tell us, Mark, are there mathematical instruments in this? I dare say now 'tis one of those 'theologites' which exasperate the squire when engineers come with them about gentlemen's grounds."

Mark kept picking up compasses and fixing them in their cases; then busied himself with rolling up plans and traceries, carefully and curiously, making no answer.

"Do let me see it, Mark, and tell me what such things have to do with making level roads for trains to run upon."

"It's not a theodolite," he said, "I haven't got one here; but I shall be very glad to shew you what they have to do with levelling. The superintendent has one which I will borrow."

"Well, but what is there in the case if there are none of your engineering things in it? See, Clara, what a neat little case it is; and what an exquisite lock to it!" Therewith she tilted it up and held it edgeways on the table. Mark coloured with a flush which was almost angry; but with an effort he said—

"No, no, there are no instruments, dear Miss Martha, nor any engineering things at all in there." And then with some confusion: "there is nothing in it which you would——I mean nothing which I would——"

But, to his great relief, the farmer's wife came bustling in, having only just done milking, and heard from some one that the ladies from the House were come. Cousin Martha's attention was drawn off and fixed again upon the eggs, in search of which she had come to the dairy. None were at hand; but the hens had been heard to cackle; so the farmer's wife having offered to explore the nests in the straw yard, cousin Martha went out with her, leaving Clara still seated in the window seat with folded hands. Mark ventured to give a glance at her as they left the room. Though her back was to the light he thought he could discern upon her features an inquiring look. It was hard to force out one word; nevertheless he thought the time was come; so with resolute effort he said, as he took up the case:

"Miss Jerningham, I was unwilling to tell anyone, even your good, kind cousin, what I have here; because, since you are by, I feel as if I had no right to it without your leave."

He was unfastening a little key from a ring on the steel chain of his watch. When it was loose, he offered it to Clara; as he did so she saw the muscles quiver on his wrist. With the other hand he held towards her the rosewood case.

"I have been asked what this case holds; and pressed to give an answer. I thought I should not deal respectfully by you in giving one before a third person; nor honestly, in withholding one from you yourself. If you

will kindly take this little key and open it, there will be no need for any other answer."

"There is none," answered Clara, "I know what you have there already."

"And by what strange means could Miss Jerningham——?"

"By no strange means; by the very simplest. You have Rosina's present there. When I was last in Venice she told me what she had given you."

To this Mark answered nothing, for, indeed, no effort could make his voice utter a sound. He put the little key with gentle force between the half-clasped hands of Clara, and laid the case beside her on the settle. He stepped back to the table, and leant his back against it, holding each elbow tightly grasped, keeping his grey eyes full on Clara.

It was her turn to colour, and to feel embarrassment; but she was practised mistress of emotions, so she soon said in her own clear voice—

"Why give me key or case? What should I do with either, Mark?"

"You said 'dear Mark;' by the mere, Miss Jerningham. I can't think where I find boldness to remind you of it. Perhaps you were startled into the word and did not mean it; but if you did or could——."

"Well! If I did or could?" She let emotion gain upon her now, in spite of all her wonted self-command; her voice was not above a whisper.

"Why then," said Mark, speaking slowly and deliberately, as a man may who feels that the whole cast and course of all his life to come shall bear the impress of what must follow on those next few words: "Why then

I will take back the case, but not the key. That you shall give me with your own dear hand, in token that you sanction Rosina's gift."

She made no answer, but closed her hand upon the key. An ineffable hope flushed the young man's heart. She had not put it at once away.

He crossed over to the window-seat again, took the case up gently, carried it back to the side-table, and left it there; then came and sat down in the other corner of the settle, and again holding an elbow in either hand as in the grip of a vice, he fastened his eyes upon her and looked for his fate.

Still she made no sign.

By and by he said:—"I am forgiven, or my case is past forgiveness now. I have dared to remind you by what name you greeted me; why should I fear to entreat you by that name I dared call you?"

Therewith he loosed the grip of his right hand, and held it out towards her.

"Dearest Clara!—have pity on me. Give me the little key, or let me know I must not look on that dear drawing again!"

Now she rose quietly, raised her eyes to his, and looked full at him with that trustful look so well remembered since Sermione. In its calm deep there glowed, as on the other evening by the mere, a tenderer effulgence She laid her hand in his, which closed on it and on the little key.

She did not withdraw it as cousin Martha came once more bustling into the room. The good kind soul! Her love for both, and long desire that there might come a bond of love between them, told her all. Not

only told her all, but told her that any trivial exclamation of wonderment or joy would surely be misplaced. Her own emotion was so genuine and true that it bestowed on her for that one moment the subtle "sixth sense" in which her homely nature was deficient—tact, to be silent. Only, she took in hers, with a soft momentary pressure, the two hands which she found so happily joined; placed one kiss on either, and went straight out down the garden-walk, leaving Mark and Clara to follow.

Oh, that walk across the summery meadow-grass, over the wooded upland, along the brink of the enchanted mere, on to the turfy slopes, up to the garden terraces, and into the old house at Wymerton! Such treading on air, and breathing of new delight in exultation—they come but once a life!

These two felt this delight in all the freshness, truth, and purity, which only those can taste in perfect sweetness, who have never frittered away the energy and the sincerity of their heart's affection. So much to tell, to recall, and to explain; so delicious a confusion and impossibility of marshalling, as yet, the whole array of reminiscence, experience, anticipation!

They were not conscious of having walked so very leisurely, yet they had not overtaken cousin Martha when Wymerton House was in sight; nay, they had lost sight of her, for she had reached it and gone in before they came to the boundaries of the garden-ground. Only Sir Jeffrey was there, walking to and fro upon the terrace nearest the house, fretting a little at the chance which had prevented him from letting Clara and her cousin know of the invitation he had

given Brandling to come up early in the afternoon; wondering, also, at the slackness of the young man himself in keeping his promise. He had not observed cousin Martha's approach, and had his back towards her, as she passed in at an open window. But after a turn or two, as he was facing the sloping ground towards the mere, he became aware of the advance of two persons towards the garden. His eyesight was still good for a man of his many years; but not quite so keen and clear as in old days gone by. Both figures appeared familiar, and he thought he could discern that one was leaning on the other's arm with that happy, trustful grace, so hard to put in words, yet so easy to be noted by an observant sympathising eye. Presently there could remain no doubt of their identity, nor of the expression of their gait and attitude. What this revealed came somewhat unexpectedly upon the good old baronet. He had not watched them narrowly enough to detect the delicate shade of embarrassment, which had lain upon their bearing since they had so strangely met at Wymerton. What he had noted had been rather the friendly manner resulting from old intimacy. Perhaps, in spite of his unprejudiced and cordial liberality, his first sensation was of disappointment at Clara's choosing a man just risen from the ranks. But, thereupon, at once, his strong good sense denied indulgence to the feeling. His fatherly regard for Clara had never been influenced one way or other by the social accident of her birth as Willie Jerningham the bookbinder's daughter; why should Mark's origin, in all probability, of kindred rank, be suffered to disturb

his fair appreciation of the man? He could not deny that both young folk were in possession of the nobility which natural and cultivated gifts of intellect bestow; of the gentility which, now-a-days, the richly-gifted conquer for themselves upon the battlefield of useful and refined accomplishments, more worthily, less disputably, than in old battling times an esquire won his spurs of knighthood upon a plain of slaughter. Then flashed upon him the thought that Mark might prove a valuable, a triumphant, auxiliary against the old Maestro. The longer Clara lived with him, since her return in womanhood to the old home of her girlhood, the more he learnt to recognise in her true riches of a full, and tender, woman's nature; therefore, the more he sorrowed over the warping of her judgment and affection; over her needless violation of the sure woman's instinct, which shrinks from the invidious publicity of a dramatic artist's calling and career. A great delusion had hold upon her; he as yet had found no counterspell to dissolve the charm. What then, if love, which some call a delusion too, but which, if genuine, is, spite of all they say, the one great human reality of life—what if love, with its own master-magic, should disperse fantastic shadows, and usher in true day?

When Mark and Clara were now upon the terrace close to him, he took the young man's hand and said—

"Half one's fretting is unnecessary. I was unable to tell the ladies I had asked you to do me the honour of coming earlier this afternoon, and was put out by not finding them when I came home. Then I took

to fussing at your delay in coming up; and, after all, if I mistake not, you have drunk deeper of the pleasure I wished to give than I thought possible."

Clara had slipped indoors meantime. But her turn was to come. Sir Jeffrey watched her eyes at dinner, and as they walked up and down again together on the terrace, after it. In the hall that evening, as he opened the organ for her before prayers, he put his hand upon her shoulder and said, in a half-whisper—"There is some fate about that railway, child, some spell between it and you. You remember what I said I should do with the price of Alice's oaks?"

CHAPTER XXV.

PALADIN AND WATER-SPRITE.

THE engines were come, and the hard work to which Mark had been looking forward was in full swing.

Hard work, that mistress of stern brow, had never seemed, at any time, to frown on that true-hearted working man. As children will have for a nurse of austere countenance, not only reverence, but such affection as she conquers from them, by steady, though undemonstrative, manifestation of her own, even so Mark, nursed in the lap of labour, had learned to read loving-kindness in the lineaments of her grand calm face. Nevertheless, there was an exquisite new sense of pleasure and of incalculable reward in the softer, sunnier smiles, which would now not seldom greet him after a day of exertion, or even during its course. Clara would come, as she had often done before, leaning on Sir Jeffrey's arm to inspect the progress of the works. She might have shrunk from commencing such a practice now; but since it was an old habit by this time, she saw no reason for its discontinuance, because Mark's respectful, loving, recognition was added to the greetings of her rougher

friends. Her presence, far from disturbing, seemed to quicken and endow him with more than common energy. His plans and proposals had been adopted by his employers; he felt that success depended on the accuracy of his own calculations, and on his own capacity for executing what he had devised. Neither Miss Jerningham, nor yet Sir Jeffrey Wymer, were very competent judges in hydraulics; but they could see, as well as all the family of Stephensons, whether he did or did not succeed in pumping the water out of the tunnel, and in making it possible for Joe Tanner's men to bore the hill-side, and come out in triumph at the other end.

Fair reader of the nineteenth century, nurtured perchance in pouting scorn of its prosaic aspect, wishing perhaps to look always at human effort and endurance through some false pretty prism of historical romance, do not, I pray you, suffer yourself to despise this faithful picture of a genuine romance of modern life.

Your nursery-tales of early childhood,—more wholesome myths, I take it, than much of that fictitious history you have read since,—than many of the sickly sentimental libels current on what was truly grand and noble in the fancy-tinted ancient time—your good old nursery tales, which, in the freshness of your childish feelings, you loved so well—have told you, in their old mythic form, more than one such tale as this.

You thought him, did you not? bold, brave, and lovable, the man, in knightly panoply, adventuring into the cave where some fell water-demon guards the choicest jewel for the fair princess's bridal crown?

Your tiny heart beat for him as he went down into darkness, as the treacherous roofing of damp earth began to crumble overhead, threatening to bar his backward passage to the light, to leave him, crushed and defenceless, to the watery monster his dread foe?

Well, a bold brave heart was in Mark Brandling—in Joe Tanner too, and his broad-shouldered navvies. They faced danger, they endured toil, to conquer the water in the dark crumbling tunnel, with a manly patience and determination fairly challenging the admiration of a womanly heart. As for skill, and forethought, and intelligence, to serve the resolute will, no cunning magician of those fine fairy tales was ever more truly gifted with them than our studious Mark. As for gentleness and tenderness, which, I grant you, should be ingredients in your true paladin's character, you have seen him in the old palazzo by the water street in Venice, Rosina's toddling brothers and sisters crowding round. So if you have any thing of a possible mother's heart within you, a tenderer thing than your most delicate fancies, Miss, you can judge of him in this as well or better than I of his own sex can do. If you have not—then, I protest, I give no great weight to your verdict.

He had a jewel too to fetch out from that moist gloom. Self-advancement had not been hitherto his absolute aim and end. That is sometimes difficult even for a sincerely generous soul to realise. But now had crept, close into his heart, the dearest, daily, hourly, reminder of the truth. Yesterday he was a lover only;

to-day, by tacit agreement, an affianced husband. The jewel for which he was adventuring was such advancement in his calling, as should give him prospect of offering a home to Clara not in too violent contrast with her ordinary circumstances. Her stay under Sir Jeffrey's roof would not and could not be more than an episode in her life. At Venice she had lived in comfort, but in strict simplicity; more easily, perhaps, than she might have to do for the first years of their union. But he felt, as by sure instinct, that the sweet hopefulness of those first wedded days, would carry her through such diminution of material ease, not in mere cheerfulness, but in a joyous spirit of sacrifice. He did not know that Clara was possessed of any patrimony. His notion was, that her profession had furnished the resources he had seen at her command in Italy. These would, of course, be forthwith and for ever at an end; therefore, he considered himself bound, in all honesty and honour, to fight his way to a position which should enable him to make fair compensation for them, before he ventured to press any claim on her beyond allowance of his heart-whole affection. He had good hope such fight would not be lengthy. Should he succeed at Wymerton, he must at once rise above a subaltern position in the service of the firm. And he had in reserve other developments and applications of mechanical power, which he was confident would raise him to no mean standing-place among inventors, could he acquire the confidence of the capitalists whom he served, and secure the help of their money and machinery to carry out his plans. Early and late, therefore, he was at the works, urging them on with a zeal and energy of the rarest kind; not only

giving vigilant superintendence to the general direction, but adjusting details with a nicety and exactness even of manual skill, which were the admiration and envy of the handicraftsman whom the firm had despatched to his assistance. As for Joe Tanner and the navvies, their appreciation of him rose higher and yet higher with every four-and-twenty hours of his command.

Joe had seen too much of such difficulties as were impeding the progress of the tunnel at Wymerton, not to know their gravity. He was not of very sanguine temperament at the best of times; and had a prophet's interest in the mishaps which he had been first to foretell. Nevertheless, his confidence was thoroughly won by Mark in the course of his preparations, and he loudly proclaimed in Sir Jeffrey's ear, when he could catch it, the favourable issue that was sure to come.

"That young mon's boun' to beat the water, sir; nowt wun't stop him, nor his poomps neither—beauties they is—till we coom out dry a 'tother side now!"

And the very first hours of experiment, when Mark's machinery was got into working order, went far towards verifying Mr. Tanner's new prediction. The water sensibly diminished, and seemed unable thenceforth to make head against the new exhaustive power brought to bear on it. Mark's versatile ingenuity came into play in other directions also. His precautions against the precarious condition of the soil in the advancing vault, as the men were enabled to resume their excavating work, were no less skilful and no less efficacious than his hydraulic efforts. Before his coming there had been one man killed, and no less than four seriously maimed,

in this struggle against nature in the bowels of earth. From the moment of his assuming the direction no serious accident occurred, nor did his stout soldiers of labour receive any, but such injuries as their athletic frames counted for trifles.

Clara knew this: unless she had dropped at once her acquaintance with Joe Tanner, she could not have avoided hearing of it over and over again. Surely the guerdon of a sunny smile was never so worthily bestowed upon the daintiest hero of romance for a dashing exploit of slaughter, as when she dealt it out, in those happy working days, to the wise, thoughtful saviour of human life and limb, in the conduct of that manly work of industry!

Clara was proud of her plebeian lover: well she might be! And it were hard to say how bright an augury of hope he drew meanwhile from his discovery of the intelligence, which had been long since established between Clara and the working men. Her frank and fearless bearing with them; their no less frank recognition of it; together with the awkward chivalry of their manifest admiration and respect, surprised and charmed him beyond words. His highest hope was to become a worthy captain of industry by and by; and here was indeed a "ladye-love" meet for one attempting such "emprise."

Joe Tanner found Mark very tolerant of his frequent allusions to the social amenities which had passed between his gangsmen and the folk up at the House. He never gave token of impatience at repetitions of the effect which Clara's appearance, manner, and gifts, had made upon them all. But Joe could scarcely guess

with what eagerness Mark heard his praises, nor with what guiltless cunning he would contrive to lead him on again and again to utter them.

Mark had written to his friend Ingram—not immediately, nor yet without much previous irresolution. He was very chary of his new-found treasure, and little inclined to impart his finding to any other human soul. But that which turned the scale of decision in favour of writing to the Curate, was his detecting within his own mind some lingering remains of an unworthy jealousy. It was a rag of that old cloak of social prejudice which had once clothed his mind from head to foot.

"Why should a man of Ingram's class and training have any real interest in the life-story of two children of the people?"

No sooner had he forced the ill-defined sentiment into some definite shape, than it forthwith appeared to him in its own naked meanness. Acting at once, therefore, upon his truer and more generous impulse, he wrote to the young clergyman a modest and grateful account of what had befallen him at Wymerton. The answer he received increased his compunction and shame at having been again in danger of giving harbour within his breast to a notion so unworthy. Nothing could be more delicate, nothing more cordial, nothing more brotherly than Ingram's reply. It was written with unaffected sincerity. Mark's announcement took him truly by surprise. But the surprise brought no moral disturbance with it. He had not been fighting all along as one that beats the air. The conquest of passion by principle within him was a living truth. He could rejoice in Mark's joy, not without his own special glow of a joy,

fervent though subdued, in the assurance, thus gained, of real progress in the great self-conquest he had sought.

Sir Jeffrey likewise had entered into a correspondence, suggested by the intrusion of this new element into the probable future of Clara Jerningham. The more likelihood he saw of detaching her from the pursuit of a theatrical career, the more eagerness he felt to succeed in so doing. The Maestro had not recurred to any discussion of his own plans before leaving Wymerton, and he did not know what fresh temptations to Clara's enthusiasm and misdirected ambition, might not suddenly arise in that quarter. He was too wise to let a word escape him which should betray to her that he reckoned on Mark as an ally in his strife against her professional predilections. He was too prudent to commit himself by any direct allusion to the matter in conversation with Mark himself. But he undertook, with the tact and shrewdness that years and a long habit of men can give, to sound the young man's thoughts and feelings. He soon satisfied himself that Mark and he were of one mind upon the propriety of Clara's pursuit of her artistic vocation. It was also clear to him that Mark's influence, or more strictly, his right to use it, might depend in great measure upon his own professional prospects, and his ability to offer her a competent maintenance and comfortable home. The old baronet, therefore, put himself into confidential communication with the eminent firm of MM. Bright and Brassy. Without giving them any clue to his private reasons, he let them know his interest in the young man's success, and begged to hear, in strict confidence,

their opinion of his talents and capacity for business. Perhaps the firm, in spite of their regard for Mark, would hardly have thought it worth while to enter very fully into the matter, had not the shrewd old baronet inquired further on what conditions a man might hope to be admitted partner in the firm. Sir Jeffrey was suspected of being eccentric, and was well known to be very rich; therefore, as Mr. Saunders remarked, "there was no knowing but he might push young Brandling on a bit." At any rate the possibility of Mark's having such a patron was far from unfavourable to the firm's estimate of their subordinate; if it did not influence unfairly their expression of reliance on his character and confidence in his skill, at all events it did something towards inducing them to make it unreservedly. The firm, however, told the baronet, in all fairness and honesty; that, with regard to professional attainments and skill, Mark's capacity had never yet been brought to such test as that which was now daily trying it, and that the works at Wymerton must settle the question one way or another.

This being so, there was no more to be done immediately, and Sir Jeffrey determined to wait the result of Mark's exertions, before consulting him on the best assistance he might lend him towards a start in married life.

Unconscious of this underplot of her dear old friend, Clara had not yet felt any necessity for facing the probable effect on her own artistic schemes of the decision her heart had taken in favour of Mark Brandling. His lips were, for the time, sealed; and as she had, at present, no very definite plan of action, there was no reason

why the first mention of it should proceed from her. So weeks went on, and there was still but indefinite talk of that prismatic coming time, on which lovers dwell so fondly in anticipation. Though they often saw each other, their opportunities for long conversations were but few. The malicious water-sprite, in his dark cave, had been seriously weakened; but triumph over him was not yet complete, and Mark was not the man to wrangle with his ladye-love concerning the fashion of a bridal crown which yet lay between the dragon's claws. Nay, there were evenings when his manful self-denial was such, that although earlier released from his task at the hill-side, he would forego the indulgence of sunning himself in her own eyes, content to open the rose-wood case with the precious keylet she had left him, and to set it up where he might have glance of it as he sat poring over new plans and drawings. There was a new sunshine over his being; its warmth and brightness should force on to maturity seedlings of invention, which had heretofore been dormant in his brain.

One thing, however, troubled Clara—the Maestro's strange notion of offering his hand to her good cousin. Her own womanly feeling naturally caused her to feel reluctance against writing to him about her own engagement. But he had declared that his only wish was to give herself a fatherly protection: and she now felt, although the realizing of the truth seemed distant, that she had pledged herself to concede right of protection by a dearer title to another. She therefore would have written to inform him of what had taken place, had not the dear old musician, with his usual abstraction, left Wymerton without leaving his address behind him.

Her acquaintance with him had been formed and cemented abroad; she had no knowledge of his probable abiding place in England. She, too, was thrown back thus upon a policy of expectation.

In the meantime, she continued to live a good and wholesome life, rekindling old home affections as well as cherishing the new, possibly creative of new home realities. She did not often go beyond bounds of the estate at Wymerton; her old friends were the immediate neighbours in the village, who had known and loved her as Willie Jerningham's daughter. Such right of entry as might have been conceded by provincial "society," in virtue of artistic gifts and genius, she had not cared to claim, nor had Sir Jeffrey sought it for her. He was too glad to have her artistic character ignored as much as possible.

At the works all went on well. So well, indeed, went Mark's mastering of the water, that nothing now prevented the tunnelling from being pushed on with redoubled vigour. But the construction and fitting of engines and engine-house had caused some delay, and by the time the water-sprite was worsted, the day of forfeits and penalties was nervously near. Yet Mark's spirit was indomitable, and his activity indefatigable.

"A peremptory party, gentlemen," said Mr. Saunders to the firm; "peremptory, but practical. I think, gentlemen, we should let him have the hands he wants."

This was in consequence of a telegram from the young engineer to Manchester, sent when it was clear that the pumps had conquered: demanding such a

reinforcement as would triple his number of navvies. The next morning's post brought his letter with time calculations, staking his credit upon the entire completion of the work within the given period, if only the demand met with immediate compliance. This was just the style in which the great firm loved to have their industrial battles fought.

"None of your dallying, and dawdling, and dropping into Directors' hands at last," said Mr. Bright. "By all means let him have the men, Mr. Saunders. He seems the right sort of chap to use 'em when he's got 'em. Let him have the men."

So Mark did get them; and made right good use of them; and hard enough at work he kept them; maintaining, all things considered, a wonderful amount of discipline and order, to which no doubt the hardness of the work, and his own unflagging superintendence, greatly contributed.

He had them, of course, on both sides of the tunnel, so that the rail at the farther side being in working order, the whole branch would be complete when the one link there should be supplied. Neither the money nor the credit of the firm should lie at the mercy of any body or board whatever.

The event answered his expectation. Not only "navvies," but bricklayers, masons, carpenters, and platelayers toiled manfully. Amidst tremendous cheers and waving of flags, a long train of trucks passed from station to station through the tunnel one Saturday afternoon. Sir Jeffrey himself took Mark in the barouche, with Clara radiant, and Cousin Martha loudly jubilant, to the telegraph station, some three miles down the

line, whence the message flew on the wire to Manchester—"Brandling, Wymerton, to Saunders, Park-street, Manchester, Saturday, 4.20. Train passed the tunnel. Line fit for traffic Monday." Now Thursday was the day of the malignant directors.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BUNCH OF KEYS. A LINK SNAPPED.

No sooner was Mark's engineering success complete and indisputable, than Sir Jeffrey hastened to renew communications with the Manchester firm. He had his reasons for not losing a single day. A letter had reached him from the Maëstro, the contents of which, he knew, it would soon be vain attempting to keep from Clara, had he considered such an attempt in itself as honourable or fair.

It was the Maestro's ambition for her that she should appear before the most critical and appreciative audience of her own, if not of any country. He felt sure that, in the way of musical or other artistic culture, there was little or nothing for her genius to gain, short as her previous career had been. He wished her to sing at the Queen's theatre in London. He felt, however, pretty confident that, with whatever enthusiasm she might accede to a proposal, she would, by no means, consent to make solicitation for herself to the reigning musical authorities, nor would she be likely to debate with them the conditions to which he at least considered her fully entitled.

He had, therefore—so he now wrote to Sir Jeffrey—exercised a long and weary diplomacy to bring about a

consideration of his scheme. When, at last, he had contrived to bring them to give it entertainment, his task had, in reality, begun rather than ended. Objections had been raised, such as might have been expected: shortness of experience, comparative absence of notoriety and so forth. These refuted or overridden, forthwith had sprung up a new crop, disparaging comparisons with this or that kindred celebrity; hardly consistent in the case of the objectors, quoth he, "since they pronounce on one of whom they have just said, that she is not well known enough to be pronounced upon. But they know me, at least, these inconsistent objectors; and it would be mock-modesty on my part not to perceive that they cannot quite bring themselves to neglect her in the teeth of my guarantees and predictions."

In a word, the Maestro's letter made it plain that his negotiations were beginning to assume importance, and that some conditional offer, likely to be flattering and persuasive to Clara's artistic ambition, would, perhaps, be soon made to her.

Sir Jeffrey's mind was too candid and equitable to permit his endeavouring, by any concealment, to entrap Clara into such definite engagement towards Mark, as should make it hard for her to dictate conditions subsequently without apparent breach of faith. But since his best hope of dispelling her infatuation lay in the exercise of such authority as her own consent should give a betrothed husband, the good old baronet was anxious to enable Mark to win that position without ambiguity and without delay.

The answers of MM. Bright and Brassy to his renewed inquiries, were now completely satisfactory. It

appeared, that independently of premium or partnership, Mark's professional position was henceforth secure. The Wymerton campaign had lifted him absolutely, and without recall, from a subaltern sphere. He was gazetted field-officer of industry. As to Sir Jeffrey's cautious overtures on the point of financial association, they were again met with a caution equal to his own; yet, with sufficient favour to justify him in the conclusion that they were not meant to be rejected altogether. He had no reason to suspect Mark of interested views in regard to Clara. When, on the plea of acquaintance with her since her birth, as of previous long and friendly connexion with her father, the old gentleman, in a tone of kindly authority, questioned him concerning his prospects and intentions,—he received such straightforward, respectful, and loving answers, as entirely confirmed his favourable opinion of him. But as the fairness of Sir Jeffrey's character forbade him to wish that Clara should decide on Mark's proposal without full knowledge of all that might sway her judgment, so did its delicacy forbid him to do any thing which might rob Mark of the full satisfaction of making it without other motive than his own affection and the hope of offering a position which his own exertions should keep from proving onerous and hard. No word was therefore uttered by Sir Jeffrey concerning Clara's actual patrimony, nor concerning any intention he might have of augmenting it. But he did impart to Mark the intentions of the Maestro, his present proceedings, and their probable result, leaving it to his own good sense and feeling to act upon such information.

There were certain matters, connected with the

accounts of the work just finished, which called Mark to Manchester for a few days, after the lapse of which he would return to Wymerton, set things in order, and then, in much probability, leave for good and all. He determined, therefore, to make some attempt during his visit to ascertain and fix, as far as possible, his future position with the firm. If he should gain satisfaction upon the point, he thought to return by Newton-Forge and take counsel with Ingram, whom he now resolved to trust unreservedly. For there was yet in his mind an apprehension of a coming conflict within itself likely to arise out of that conflict with Clara, which again began to appear inevitable. Sir Jeffrey's communication had resuscitated, under a shape more formidable and definite, doubts which the freshness of his exultation at her first allowing of his love had laid for a time. Whatever his personal diffidence had been, that act of loving-kindness had dispelled it once for all. She had declared her judgment that he was not personally unworthy of her, and he knew the gauge of her mind too well to be tormented by misgiving that she had done this lightly, or that without grave cause she would come back upon her decision. But he now felt that he had underrated the difficulties which his own plans for the ordering of their married life might have to encounter from her artistic prepossessions. What if she should attach to her acceptance of him a condition of freedom to pursue a career, for which her preparation had been so masterly, and in which her first steps had been so successful? He had a presentiment that to debate this question beforehand with himself was not to fight a shadow.

To debate it with her until his own conviction should be clear, his resolution definite, were unworthy both of her and of himself. It seemed indisputable that her chosen calling must be counted inconsistent with the true ideal, not of wifehood only, but of worshipful, love-worthy, Christian womanhood. Yet a fear haunted him and vexed his soul, that his own judgment might be unjustly biased after all. Should she claim, and should he refuse, freedom to carry on her course, could he be satisfied within himself that principle not prejudice exacted this refusal? Was he assured this artist-life was unbefitting Clara Jerningham, or only apprehensive of its ill-befitting Clara Brandling? He loved her too fondly to sacrifice the prospect of their union to a prejudice, too nobly to secure it at cost of any real principle. He felt it necessary to clear his own conscience before venturing on dispute with hers.

The result of his interviews at Manchester, first with Mr. Saunders, then with the chiefs themselves, was entirely reassuring as to employment and salary. Indeed, being ignorant of the conciliatory intervention of Sir Jeffrey, he was rather surprised at their willingness to give at least consideration to his designs. Having settled the Wymerton accounts, and taken directions for the transfer of the machinery, he was informed that his services, on their new footing, would at once be required in a different part of England, where the firm had just signed a contract for the execution of Government works. The sooner he could put the Wymerton business out of hand the better—"And by all means go down to Newton-Forge, Mr. Brandling, for a day or two, if any convenience to self: nothing

could fall in better with the affairs of the firm just now; there is that order for the forty-two thousand iron flanges, you know, sir—not exactly in your new department—but, still, if you could inquire about the unaccountable delay, and put an end to it peremptorily"—and so forth, said Mr. Saunders.

Now, what Mark meant by "trusting Ingram unreservedly," was not the display of the morbid anatomy of his own mind. What he desired was the decision of a clear, conscientious, and chastened mind, such as the clergyman's; a comparison of which, with his own judgment, might help to satisfy him of the soundness of its conclusions. He would not affect to put a hypothetical case, nor pretend to conceal how closely and intricately the matter was bound up with the warmest affection of his heart. Happily, as I think, for the satisfaction of his own mind in a sorrowful after-time, the proposed consultation did not take place. He had not written to apprise Ingram of his intended visit, and on arriving at Newton Forge found the curate absent. Travers was taking his duty for a week or two. I take it that, as I have already said, it was a happy thing for Mark and for the irrevocable steadfastness of his conviction thereafter, that he was thus thrown back upon the thoughts of his own heart and its own individual appeal to a guidance higher than its own. It is true that at this time he was giving Ingram credit for being no mere conventional thinker; but the day might come, when, in the chafing of his spirit, he should be tempted to forget upon how good grounds he had trusted him. Conventional thinking is no uncommon mental habit; perhaps not more common among the clergy than among

other classes, yet readily ascribed to their order as a characteristic by laymen. If Mark now suspected himself of possible unfairness towards Clara, from personal feelings, might not he come in time to suspect his friend of unfairness towards her calling from feelings that were professional?

On his return to Wymerton, he asked Sir Jeffrey whether he had made known to Clara the drift of the Maestro's communication, and rejoiced to be told that he had. He, too, was wise enough, just enough, and generous enough, to desire that in the anticipated conflict, Clara should have a full fair view of the ground she was to defend or to abandon.

On the next evening the crisis came. He had gone up to the House in search of Clara late in the afternoon; learning from cousin Martha that she had gone for a walk in the direction of the mere, he followed, and found her near the spot of their unexpected meeting on the day of his first arrival. A fitter place for carrying out to its consequences the discovery made then and there could scarcely have been found, nor one of which the endearing reminiscences were more likely to plead in favour of his present more definite suit. The months of the short English summer were gone already, and even such months of autumn as kept unchilled upon them the lingering warm breath of summer. The green walk by the water's edge was paved already with a mosaic of fallen leaves, yellow, purple, and red. The kiss of the evening air was damp upon Clara's cheek, cold enough to remind her of the icy touch of a coming frost. There was but little glow of sunset upon the steel-grey sheet of the mere.

Thin blue columns of smoke, tapering and transparent, seemed to stand motionless over the chimneys of the old house, distinct against the foliage of the huge trees yet leafy in the back-ground, and discernible above them, against the vaulted sky. None of the joyous woodland singers were astir and vocal; only the sweet melancholy pipings of Robin Red-breast were to be heard.

"Ah, Mark! is that you?" she said, as she turned to the sound of the footfall behind her. "I was just thinking it was time to go back."

"Why not 'dear Mark,' so close upon the spot where I first surprised the word?"

He offered her his arm, which she took as they both faced homewards.

"Well, then, dear Mark; though the demand is perhaps exorbitant. Remember, sir, at all events, the word was spoken in return for 'dearest Clara.'"

"True, but I will say 'dearest,' as often as it shall please your patience to hear me repeat it. I know, no croak of mine, even with a thousand 'dearests' in it, is worth one of those silvery 'dear Marks' of yours. But I came here to beg your leave to call you, 'dearer than dearest now.'"

"I hardly understand," she said, and turned upon him that searching, trustful look by which he knew her best.

"I told you that day at the dairy-farm, I knew not where I found the boldness to ask you for an explanation. Now you ask me for one, and I do know where I find boldness to give it unreservedly."

"Pray where, sir?" she said laughingly, "though your boldness now-a-days is no such rare phenomenon."

"I find it, dearest, very dearest," he answered, not

jestingly, but with an accent of the deepest, most respectful tenderness; "I find it in the unexpected, undeserved, unswerving generosity of your own noble heart."

She felt the strong arm on which she leant tremble with intensity of the same feeling that caused the speaker's manly voice to quiver as he spoke. She almost longed to turn the trustful look again upon him; but, somehow, felt it impossible to do so now. She looked down on the leaf-strewn moss. Mark noted that rare downcast look with inward joy.

"Yes, you have been beyond words generous to me, since those first sunny days in Italy. Even then, before I dared to form a hope of what has come to pass between us; when my heart was sour enough with all sorts of pride, I felt that generosity most deeply. Many such as you were then, would never have held out a sisterly hand to such as I was, nay to such as I am now. Never think I have forgotten that, nor can, because you grant me what is more. Never think it, even if you grant what I am summoning up boldness to ask for in addition."

Then they walked on a little space in silence; for Mark, in truth, was very nervous after speaking these heartfelt words.

By every token Clara knew it. She was profoundly touched by their loving humility, and by the passionate sincerity of tone in which they had been uttered. She wished with delicacy to reward him; and as he still kept silence, she thought that she could best achieve her wish by pressing on him gently a demand for the explanation which he had professed himself so bold to give, from which he yet appeared to shrink.

"Tell me, dear Mark, then," she forced herself to say, "what did you mean just now by begging leave to call me dearer than dearest?"

"You remember, do you not, by what act I entreated you that other time? I begged you to return one little key into my keeping. What I beg you now to do is to take a bunch of keys into your own. Does that explain?"

"Hardly," she answered.

"Well, the plain truth is,—I do want courage to speak it out,—I am getting dissatisfied—unreasonable creature—even with leave from you to look upon the portrait in the rosewood case. Clara, dearest, I think I could now make a home for us if your own sweet face were given to brighten and to bless it. You are the only love I ever had; could only be so more entirely by consenting to become my wife. That is what I meant by asking leave to call you dearer than the dearest you are now."

She made no answer; but as he stood a moment in expectation, she did at last look up, with her own look, and he was satisfied.

"You will take the keys then? To take is sometimes more generous than to give. Not even that is wanting to you. I will try to live thanks; when one owes such as I do, there is no speaking them."

Then he went on to tell her in the simplest and most modest manner what were for him,—"for us," indeed, he said, and she did not reprove, but even smiled at him for saying so—the material consequences of that success, with his struggle for which, as with its issue, she had all along so warmly sympathized.

"It's nothing very great or splendid after all, I

know," he continued, "and with a woman of less lofty character than yours, a man might need to make apologies: but with you, dearest, I thought, if you would take me, there was no need to talk at length over the little that is mine."

This was just such appreciation of her, as thoroughly pleased Clara Jerningham; this time, without effort or hesitation, but with a glory in her eyes, she once more turned her look upon him.

"And I may say to you,—you will not misunderstand me, nor think I could be presumptuous, at least when you are by—I have good hope there is more *here* than others know, for all they have spoken kindly and honourably of my powers."

As he spoke he bent down his forehead and touched it with the back of the white hand which lay upon his arm.

"Man's mind is in his Maker's hand, I know; but if it should be in his purpose to let me work out my designs, I think I have found a starting, not a resting point. There may be by-and-by a heavier bunch of keys."

"Well, Mark, I shall be glad of it; I know you will not misunderstand me in return. If your work and your honour in working hang fresh keys on the household ring, I shall rejoice, for the work's sake and the honour of the worker, not for the greater store under lock and key."

What pride and delight he felt in being understood at once by her! What fulness of joy this moment would have brought with it, but for the apprehension of what remained unsaid! By this time they had reached the terrace, and it was almost dark. They passed into the

house through a glass door opening to the ground in dame Alice's little oak-panelled room. That was the cheeriest, snuggest place imaginable for conversation in the winter time, no less than the coolest and pleasantest for looking out upon the garden beds in summer. But only on condition of a red coal fire on the hearth, whose warmth and glow the strips of Venetian mirror with prismatic edges should reflect and multiply. This evening there was no fire on dame Alice's hearth. It was too dark and cold to sit or loiter there; so fastening the glass door, they passed on, Mark watching Clara's manifold image flitting in the strips of mirror as they went. In the hall there was a blazing fire of logs, to the brightness of which they were at once attracted, though the excitement which had been coursing through the veins of either as they walked up from the mere, had prevented them from feeling the chilliness of the evening air. On one side of the fire-place stood a sofa, where Clara threw her shawl and garden-hat, and gloves, as she unfastened them. On the other stood the organ, which was open, and at which she then sat down. She played a few chords and began to sing. Mark's face was turned from her, his right arm raised and bent against the pilaster of the tall stone mantel-piece, his forehead resting on it, his left hand spreading its fingers to the warmth, and gently closing them in cadence to the rhythm of Clara's song. His keen grey eyes were watching the upward flight of the bright sparks which came flaring from the logs, as now and then he stirred them with his foot upon the hearth-stone.

It was a long-drawn, solemn measure, to which she

sang the words of an old Latin hymn. At first the plaintive melody seemed to unman Mark; he felt as if he never should have heart to speak what still lay hidden in his mind. By-and-by there was a grander, fuller swell of music, which seemed to raise the pitch of the listener's spirit, and being long sustained, to fix it at the higher elevation. When Clara left off she wheeled round towards the fire. Mark, roused by the stopping of the music, turned also, and stood facing her, his back against the pilaster, and his arms crossed upon his chest. She sat, much as she had done on the window-settle at the dairy-farm, with hands folded in her lap, only she did not look at him. She, too, was looking at the crackling sparks from the wood fire, the heavy silken braids of her brown hair falling forward and darkening the white expanse of her brow.

"How thrilling organ music is," Mark then began. "If I can't afford to buy one, smaller of course than that, for our first home, I think I will make a desperate attempt to build one, as James Watt did."

"Did the father of steam-engines build an organ, Mark? That must have been difficult. What sort of an organ was it? Not very musical, I fear."

"A very sweet-toned organ I have heard, and of singular accuracy. We mechanics, you know, can do something at times to meet approval even of you musicians."

"Who denied it, you saucy smith?" she said, with a smile.

"Ah! but the strange thing is that James Watt built his organ without a particle of musical skill to help him —he could not tell one note from another all his life."

"How then, did he contrive to make his organ do, so?"

"By the nicest calculation, and the most exquisite manual skill. His brain, and eye, and hand, built him his organ; as for ear he had none, and did without it."

"Well, it seems wonderful. But you shall not get half the credit he deserved, Mark, even should you succeed in organ building as in pumping tunnels. To begin with, you have a fair ear of your own, in spite of the croak in your voice, as you call it. Then, if you build an organ for me, sir, am I to be kept out of the workshop altogether? Why should I not turn round your saucy sentence on you, 'we musicians, you know, might, at a pinch, help you mechanics'?"

It was a fair hit, and he had no retort at hand, so he laughed and said—

"To have your help at any work of mine, I should be charmed to set about organ building to-morrow."

"Fine professions! But, I dare say, you could look cross enough at having 'feckless womin folk,' as Joe Tanner calls us, touching and meddling with tools and lathes in your workshop."

"Time will show," said he.

"True. But whilst we talk of musical instruments, there is one thing I must insist upon. You shall not be at the expense of buying me a piano. That is a present I mean to make myself. None but an admirable instrument will do for me, and they are expensive. However, I am rich enough just now; it is some time since I have earned any thing, but I have spent nothing during all the months I have been here."

"Oh, Clara, dearest! that navvy's sick wife, with the

seven children, told me quite a different tale. She says, and so does Tanner, that your open hand is" . . . .

"Fit only to shut mouths with, which talk nonsense," she said, as she rose and suddenly laid her fingers upon his lips; so quickly that she was in her seat again with folded hands before they could take advantage of it. "Now don't interrupt again so rudely. What was I saying? That I should provide myself with my own piano. Yes, to be sure I must. It would be too bad to come as partner to a working-man, and not even bring the tools of my own trade with me!"

"Bring the piano, by all means, dearest; it will cheer us both when the day's work is done; but your work, I trust, will lie no longer in that direction."

She looked up in some surprise.

"What can you mean, Mark? Is ours not to be a partnership of work?"

"Indeed I trust it will, and in the truest sense; but what I meant was, that my wife will have no need to follow an artist-life."

He spoke very deliberately and distinctly, watching eagerly what effect the words might have.

"No need?" she asked; "no need of what sort, Mark? After all your talk about my generosity, of what sordid notion can it be possible you think me guilty?"

She put her hands up to her forehead, parting and holding the silken braids back, that she might look him full in the face. There was such painful surprise in her expression, that Mark's heart, tender as brave, was cut by it to the quick.

"Suspect you of a sordid notion, Clara! Had I

dared to do so, how could I have prayed my petition of to-night?"

"But, Mark, from what you said, you must imagine that I should be dissatisfied with what you could let me share with you—what care I how little, so my heart is satisfied of your esteem and love—or else you do me the injustice to imagine that I have been an artist all along for sake of gain. Explain, I insist upon it."

There was a heat of anger on her countenance such as he had never seen on it before. Nevertheless, he answered firmly, though respectfully:—

"I never thought you capable of following a calling for mere gain, but I believed you earned your livelihood as an artist, and know nothing to the contrary now. Surely you know me well enough to understand that your earning it would be among those truest claims to reverence which I admit in you."

She felt there was truth in this: the old fellow-toiler feeling, which had first drawn her to him, breathed as it were a breath of coolness upon her white English brow, under which, in every vein, was beginning to boil the quick blood of her Italian mother.

Her look of inquiry kept steadfast; but flashed less passionately.

This softened Mark, who added in humbler tone—

"I fear I stumbled, without intention, on an awkward and false way of saying what I wished to say. Do not be angry, dearest."

She too, was seemingly disarmed at once.

"Forgive me, Mark, I was hasty and unkind."

She held out one hand, which he took, oh, so gently,

with such manly tenderness, between his own two Vulcan hands, and pressed it.

But Clara would not remain unsatisfied, nor was it his wish that she should.

"What was it, then, you wished to say, Mark, that I was so foolishly ready to misunderstand?"

"Can you remember, dearest," he then asked, as at the moment a vivid reminiscence flashed on him, "how you talked with your friends at Venice, the day after your first appearance at the theatre?"

Again her hands were folded in her lap; again the silken braids fell forward on her forehead as she inclined her head; again she sent her gaze into the red embers, for the logs had now ceased to crackle and sparkle and blaze. She was silent for at least a minute, seeking to recall the memories of winged words that had sped to and fro between her friends and her.

Mark's heart was beating against his strong ribs, ready to burst them.

When she raised her head again, she said—

"I have been trying to recall the impressions of that day and hour, Mark; I think I am now ready to follow what you have to say of them."

"I was there that afternoon, listening eagerly to every word, thinking no scorn of you yourself" . . . .

"No scorn of me, Mark!" and astonishment grew in her fixed gaze.

"No scorn of you, but some perhaps of myself, and, certainly, no little of what you were all talking about so earnestly."

"Your riddles grow darker at every word; do speak out plainly, Mark, at once!"

"Well, then, out at once, plainly. I was thinking scorn of that play-acting life which all of you seemed to think so proud and grand."

The anger came back again into her eyes, slowly and sternly this time; all the more terrible to look upon—that "calm in anger," which foemen find so direful in the battle-bearing of Englishmen. She stood up to confront him; neither eye flinched, his nor hers.

"Sit down again, dearest, and hear me out," he said.

She sat down at his request.

"I am making a confession, Clara, which may injure me with you. Since I feel that, you may fancy what it costs me to make it; but what is right and true must be done—pray bear with me."

She bowed with stately, yet not unkindly, grace.

"I used the words, 'thinking no scorn of you yourself,' on purpose, for I certainly was doing what I had no right to do, so far as my own knowledge went. I was judging harshly the life and those who lived it, being, in truth, ignorant of both."

"And thinking scorn of yourself a little, for what reason? Because you felt you were unjustly judging?"

"For no such good cause," he said, reddening as he spoke. "I was thinking some scorn of myself, because of what I thought the weakness which allowed my admiration for you to stem the tide of my contempt for your calling. Then you spoke words like the rouse of a war-bugle to the spirit within me. When the young lord sneered at the notion of an artist's popular triumph, you spoke up for the people's right, and share in the triumph of genius; I could have stood up and shouted for

joy, or—or have knelt down, before them all, and kissed your feet."

He uttered these last words with such a thrill of mingled pride and tenderness, that the strong light of her gaze upon him could not but soften once more for a moment.

"Then I said something, rudely and clumsily enough, I dare say, about your having 'a clear head and a sound heart, after all.' Can you remember that?"

"Perfectly; and I remember that when I threatened to take you to task some day about the meaning of your speech, you told me you would deal honestly by me when I should. I cannot say, Mark, that you have shown that honesty!"

"Wherein have I failed to do so?"

"In this, that you have hitherto concealed from me your prejudice against my dear and glorious vocation. I have been deceived in you, or my memory plays me strange tricks. You were our household friend in Venice, cousin Martha's, the Maestro's, and mine. You had well won your right to be so. I cannot forget that, nor be ungrateful for it. Neither can I forget nor be ungrateful for it, that your friendship was as great a favour to us as ours to you."

Mark shook his head, with a sad smile, in deprecation.

"But in those many months of intimacy, how came it, Mark, that not one word of disapproval of an artist-life once crossed your lips, that I can remember? Surely you would not have played the hypocrite to win me; nor could you ever think so meanly of me as to fancy that I should not, for indignation, be lost again if won, the instant I detected such a fraud?"

"No, dearest, no! I have heard talk of 'love's stratagems;' but though I never knew love, except my love for you, I thought it ever a base word. The cementing of two hearts' lives is no tricky warfare, but the sealing of a perfect bond in truth."

"How then do you account for your long, deceptive silence?"

"Whatever was deceptive in it, came of self-deceit alone. When I said I had a confession to make, I had in mind a confession of cowardice, of angry jealousies, and of imperfect love—but none of any wilful deception."

"Let me hear. You said 'of cowardice?'"

"Yes; my first learning of love brought that with it. I promised to deal honestly by you—if you had questioned me perhaps I might have kept my word; but I soon became too much afraid of you to run risk of offending you unbidden. I have no excuse to make for that, except perhaps"——

"Perhaps?"

"That when I came to know your strict, industrious, and studious life, in shame for my misjudging of all play-actors, I let my sounder judgment on their calling go along with that misjudgment out of sight."

"Well, you said of angry jealousies?"

"Oh, yes! the insolent admiration of others for you, which dared not show its insolence in your presence, but which I watched, when you had no suspicion of it, made me so savage, sometimes, that when I was in better mood, I thought it must have falsified my judgment altogether."

After this there was a pause; Clara could not bring

herself at once to put the last question home. At length she did so.

"There was a third confession, did you not say?"

"One which includes the other two. I had to confess and to beg pardon for imperfect love. Had I loved you from the very first with that entire love, which is yours now, I should have known that fears and jealousies, at least such fears and jealousies as mine were, are born of selfishness, and should have the life trampled out of them as any other brood of blindworms. Perhaps I ought to have spoken sooner; but I hardly thought it respectful, till you should give me some clear right to be your adviser. I knew that I was risking much in speaking as I have done; but you, yourself, are dearer to me now than all; dearer, truly, than my very self. Therefore, come what may, I tell you now my full, deliberate, conviction; this vocation of yours, which you call dear and glorious, is unworthy of you, maid or wife."

"Unworthy of me, maid or wife! I understand you, Mark. I do not ask what reasons have led you to that conviction. I have heard such; weighed them, and cast them away as worthless, before now. I will own that you, with what I took for your warm heart and large brain, are the last man whom I should have suspected of entertaining them."

As she said this she rose up and crossed over towards the sofa, where she had laid down her hat and shawl.

"Unworthy maid or wife!" her tone gathered indignation. "I reserve to myself the right of judging in the former case; as to the latter you have a perfect right to decide as you have done. When I gave you to understand that I accepted the offer you did me the

honour to make this afternoon, I was not aware that it was clogged with a condition. I presume you will hardly hold me bound by a promise given thus, in ignorance of circumstances."

"I hold you bound by nothing," he replied, "but what your own heart shall hold to bind it; all I ask is that you would condescend at least to discuss with me, of your patience, the reasons of my conviction."

"Why do so, when it would seem to me a mere discussion of insults? Your conviction, I doubt not, is settled; so is mine, thoroughly. I do not wish to part otherwise than in kindness, since part we must."

He knew how resolute she was, no less than passionate, so he said nothing more than this:—

"Must that, indeed, be, Clara?"

"Yes, Mark! I was willing to have gone the way of life hand in hand with you when you proposed it; but no two can do that, whose feet are purposely set on two paths that are not parallel."

As she spoke, she shuddered and drew round her the shawl she had taken up, for she felt chill at heart, and the logs had burnt out on the great hearth as they had been speaking.

"Good-bye, Mark!" She put her cold hand in his. He kissed it.

"Good-bye," he said; "God guide you still, my dear and only love."

And thus the golden chain, of which the first link had been forged in the hot sunshine at Sermione, was snapped at Wymerton, in the darkness and the cold.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REPENTINGS. A SISTER OF CHARITY.

"CARISSIMA! you should have kept your pledge, and written to me long ago."

"I was not conscious, at first, dear Pia, that the time was come indeed to redeem that pledge. When a great anger and a great sorrow together fill one's heart with pain, it is hard to distinguish which causes the torment."

Clara was kneeling again by Pia's couch in Florence. Pia's thin hands were under the silken braids again. She could see her own wan face reflected in great beads of tears, which stood in her friend's blue eyes. These she kissed away, and then, with motherly action, pressed the head against her bosom consolingly.

"Then, you know, came cousin Martha's illness close upon the time when I began to disentangle my thoughts and feelings. We were in London and, so to speak, among strangers, and I had so much to harass, and to frighten me that I had neither time nor wish to unravel skeins of doubt, regret, and remorse."

"Poverina! those must have been sorrowful days, indeed."

"And the nights worse. In the days the kind Maestro

would be there, or dear Sir Jeffrey. In the sick room I saw little of them, yet the thought that one or other was always near, ready to do whatever love could do to help me, was comforting and strengthening beyond words."

"Ah, God is very good, my Clara! Did you not feel it when things were at the worst?"

"In a feeble measure, yes; so feeble I am ashamed now to think of it." And her hands covered up her face almost involuntarily.

"There is a shame of which at last one shames not. Happy are they," said Pia, "whom that wholesome confusion covers."

"And only think how far that goodness went, and with what exquisite tenderness of Providence it was exercised! Just as the night watching was fairly beating my strength—for I could not leave to the mercies of the best hired nurse, that dear good soul who has been a mother to me—just then the Trelawneys came to town, and the Maestro met them."

"The Trelawneys, Clara? Who are they?"

"Mrs. Trelawney was Beatrice Vantini, the Venetian banker's daughter. Her husband was one of those four young men from Oxford."

"Ah, I remember now; one of the Milordo's college friends, with whom you met at Venice."

"Yes; and she brought to town with her her little Venetian maid, Rosina; the same who gave *him* my portrait, and who told me—"

"I have not forgotten her; go on, Carissima."

"Well, that girl, who has a heart of gold within her, as they say, when she found what trouble I was in,

entreated Beatrice to let her come to me. Some people complain of the cold and harshness of others; as for me, their warmth and tenderness have always been my surprise. Beatrice made no difficulty; God reward her! I do believe she would have come herself to take a turn at nursing had she not had a dear baby at her breast. But Rosina came, and she watched night about with me, with a quiet, devoted zeal, wonderful to see. In spite of all the anxieties of the present, the very sight of her was a vivid reminder of the past. She nursed him in his fever at Venice, you remember, and so found out that his heart was full of me."

"Did she ever speak of him?"

"Once, and once only. She had been looking at me wistfully, and I had half guessed what was stirring in her mind. When my look met hers, she said softly, 'Ed il Marzocco, signorina?'"

"What answer did you make?"

"None. I could not have uttered a word for worlds. But I shook my head, and then I heard her whisper, as if to herself, 'Oimè, Marzocco! povero Marzocco!' I rose and left the room."

What Clara thus detailed to Pia dei Guari had taken place about a month from the time of Mark's dismissal. What had passed between him and her since that evening in the hall had been simply this: Mark had suffered two days to go by, then had written to her these six words, no more:—

"Is this your firm determination, dearest?"

The answer had been briefer still:

"Yes, Mark."

Written in a strong bold hand.

After that, Mark had left Wymerton, and thenceforward she had heard from him no more. Then had come a letter from the Maestro inviting her to London for the purpose of being personally made acquainted with those musical and dramatic personages whom he had at last persuaded to make formal overtures to his incomparable pupil. The invitation had been accepted. Sir Jeffrey had only said:—"I am sorry, dearest child, more sorry than I can tell." He felt that where Mark had failed, he himself must fail more signally than before. Clara and cousin Martha had gone to town. The latter, cut to the heart by the rupture which had taken place, but cowed by the sternness of Clara, who was still angry and defiant.

Yet for all the anger and defiance, Mark's words had moved other feelings in her. As when a stone has been cast into the water, there was on the surface of her mind the splash and the widening ripple; but there was more than this, there was the stone, sunk down into the deep.

She had told him her convictions were settled; and in the excitement of the moment was certainly unconscious of any disturbance in them. In her wrathful, sorrowful indignation that unconsciousness continued, even for days after her receipt and answer of his note. For in that indignation, as she had truly said to Pia, wrath and sorrow together had put her proud heart in pain; wrath, because whether Mark had wilfully deceived her or not—nay, she knew the man to be too genuine to have forged false excuses—yet she had been cruelly deceived, having fully thought to have found in him a temper and a spirit kindred with her own;

sorrow, because, in truth, she did acknowledge in him after all, such kinsmanship in temper and in spirit as had knit countless fibres of her heart to his, because she had no shadow of a doubt that she was, as he had told her, his only love, and dearer to him than his very life, which she was sure she had now clouded if not darkened altogether, and because, by refusing to hear him out, she had done unjustly as well as pitilessly by him. But, "unworthy maid or wife!" Oh, those were bitter words, provoking bitter thoughts and feelings to encounter them. And this double bitterness did so infect the savour of the soul's palate that for the time it lost its power of discernment.

She had the consciousness of her own integrity. In things which are too often and too shamefully the reproach of those who follow her career, no taint or breath of evil had passed upon her. Such as she was, the glory of her maidenhood was undimmed. How dared one who offered to put on it the crown of wifehood think that its brightness could tarnish on her brow? Ah, when she put the question so, the wrath prevailed, and the fierce indignation burned, with no touch of sorrow to temper it. Injustice upon injustice this. Had not Mark carefully separated between what she was and what might surround her? Had he not confessed his own harsh haste in judging the composite nature of that surrounding atmosphere? Was not this a warrant of the probable fairness of his after judgment? What if he had misjudged her calling, wherein, after all, had he outraged her? Had he pronounced *her* unworthy maiden, to whom he had been the most respectful and brotherly of friends? Had he counted *her* unworthy to be wife, to

whom he had been the most modest, earnest, loving of suitors? There were lulls in the spirit storm when such whispers as these could not but be borne upon the breeze.

Then came back into her mind another remembrance. In what corner thereof it had been hidden away she could not tell. Not a remote one, she should have thought, for the occurrence was of no distant date. But among the many mysteries of that most mysterious faculty, the memory, where is one more mystical than that which determines the order of its action? She now bethought herself of her interview with the old, bed-ridden woman on Sir Jeffrey's estate. That poor, stricken creature had also spoken against the calling she herself held to be so glorious and dear. And it did not scandalize her in any such sense or with any such passion as Mark's condemnation. How was that?

Perhaps because the old crone's ludicrous ignorance of the circumstances, the differences, the degrees of dramatic art and life, made her misjudgment more easily pardonable. Whereas the knowledge and near view of them, which intimacy with herself had given him, left his unfairness plainly inexcusable.

This answer might have satisfied her, had she been able to dismiss the saying of the old crone—now that it returned to mind—as in her stern anger she had swept off out of court unheard the reasoning of her betrothed. But by some strange, if not unhappy inconsistency, so simple a thing as this she could not do. It did not come into her mind to say—

"Mark is more likely to have reasoned justly than my old bed-ridden friend, for he decided in full know-

ledge of the facts, and in the teeth of any tender weakness of his own heart; whereas she spoke at random, in ignorance, and with no such love for me, spite of her good feeling, as my poor Mark's."

But the fact stood so. With all her sense of regret for her manner of dealing with him, she still seemed to think he had judged falsely, and had done her cherished calling wrong; whereas she was haunted ceaselessly by the old woman's quotation of the catechism phrase touching "the pomps and vanity of this wicked world."

With all her guilelessness, enthusiasm, and personal loftiness of thought and feeling, Clara could not be blind to all the evils and the follies which, as things are, crowd and cling about her chosen career. Part of her ambition had been—that very part, perhaps, which seemed to sanction the whole—the hope she had conceived, not only of keeping her own self clear, but of helping, by influence and example, to clear the atmosphere around her. Efforts to do so she had certainly made; and that adoption of her by the Maestro, which had been so marked and singular a feature in her artist-life, had been of great assistance to them. She had kept herself spotless not only from the vices, but from the meannesses that beset this path. But in the present circumstances of the drama, perhaps especially of its lyrical branch, the ordinary exercise of the artist's calling must take place under conditions to which only a conventional standard of moral feeling can reconcile the conscience of a Christian woman worthy of esteem and love.

In Clara Jerningham's time, indeed, dramatic disregard of the first domestic decencies had not yet reached

the afflictive pitch of certain recent scandals. Within her short experience of a lyrical career, neither musical genius nor scenic art had been debased to making the morbid sentimentalities of a courtesan's dying hours the night-long entertainment of chaste matrons and their innocent girls.

Zucchetti, musical fanatic as he was, would not have written a score for such a work as that to which I allude, for any earthly consideration; and gentle as the old composer was, he would have brained with his music stool any manager who should have dared to propose to Clara appearance in any such part as that of its principal character. The exigencies of the stage have however always required of the female artist not only to brave that theatrical publicity, from which a true woman might well shrink under the least objectionable circumstances; but often to brave it under the garb and in the fictive person of those from whose very touch in private life she would shrink as from pollution.

I will not here discuss the difficult and vexed question whether the stage can ever truly count as a fit public school of morals; but I will simply ask my reader, husband or father, whether, without the schooling of that conventional morality of which I spoke, he could endure to see and hear his own heart's darling pour out into the ears of excited hundreds, in impassioned song, with all attendant circumstance of mimic expression and scenic display, the feelings of such an outrage upon womanhood as Lucrezia Borgia, or even of such pitiful disgracers of it as the victims of Don Giovanni?

Talk of the moral warnings of such operas! To begin with I should deny them, and in a thousand cases

even the existence of an intention to convey them; but grant them, and what of that?

Who could endure to see the joy and pride of his own home made even in momentary mimicry a debased Helot on a public stage, because, forsooth, some questionable moral gain might come by possibility to Spartan mothers and their daughters in dress circles and private boxes?

Clara had raised all manner of dust-clouds before her moral eyesight heretofore in matters such as this, by talk about the claims of art, and the loftiness of æsthetical culture, and the mere ideality of the creations of genius, and I know not what other transcendental trash besides. And she had done it hitherto inadvertently, honestly, and in all sincerity; others also helping by their talk and countenance to raise these cindery clouds of Dead Sea dust about her as she went. And they who had thoughtlessly applauded her to the skies,—men and women of good and kindly natures, as it is roughly reckoned by the world, with fatherly and motherly hearts in their bodies, who would have swooned with righteous agony of shame had their own daughters insisted upon embracing Clara's career—had not they, too, with their thousand breaths, helped to raise the simoom drifts of falsehood which blinded this fatherless and motherless girl on her way into a desert, where the bones of many dead hearts and souls lie bleaching?

But though there be winds which raise dust, there be winds also, which, little by little, drive mists away. And the breathing of such a wind was passing upon Clara's conscience at the remembrance of the old bedridden woman's words. There was not a clear horizon

yet; far from it; but the haze was thinning, and better light beginning to filter through.

The Maestro therefore found an unexpected and, as he thought, an unaccountable difficulty arise in the negotiations which took place when Clara came to town. She was not unwilling to enter into engagements at Her Majesty's Theatre, nor diffident of success, nor exacting in the terms to which she would consent, save that she made a most unusual and perplexing demand upon the manager. She put into his hands a list of parts, in none of which, she declared beforehand, would she consent to sing. Among them were several admirably suited to the pitch and compass of her voice, and two in which she had obtained extraordinary success at Venice.

"But this is impossible," said the manager, "the public will insist upon such standing favourite pieces on at least a few nights in the season. As you would be 'Prima donna assoluta,' they would not endure to hear any one else in them. Half the musical newspaper critics would at once discover and point out your special fitness for these very parts: some two or three of them, at least, would know of your success in this or that at Venice. Reproaches would be heaped on me for my ineptitude and ignorance. I should be in hot water with amateurs and critics all the season, even if I should manage to scrape through it. Indeed, Miss Jerningham, I cannot see how it would be possible for me, in my position, to subscribe to such conditions."

"Very well, sir," answered Clara to such remonstrance, "it is not possible for me, in mine, to subscribe to any others. We had better, perhaps, at once consider this negotiation at an end."

"But, dear madam, allow me to point out that this is, apparently, a mere caprice. What can there be in your position, as you say, to induce you to refuse parts from which any other artist of your distinction would consider it an injury to be excluded?"

"No, sir! I am not acting from caprice, but upon principle."

"Upon some newly-adopted principle then," he answered. "Why should you not do here what you did with so much applause in Italy?"

"My doing wrong in Italy is no reason for persisting in wrong-doing in England."

"But in what respect do you conceive yourself, dear madam, to have done wrong in Italy?—Really, Signor Zuchetti,"—turning to the scarcely less puzzled Maestro,—"I am at a loss to divine the meaning of your accomplished friend and pupil!"

Then followed Clara's declaration of her motives, which struck the simple, genuine mind of the Maestro with a feeling of respect no less than of surprise, but which the manager could neither understand nor appreciate. Indeed he was convinced that this objection was but a new and ingenious device for beating him in the terms of a bargain in which she had at first, hypocritically, appeared to be so reasonable and disinterested. But whilst he was yet, upon this theory, endeavouring to hit upon some equally cunning countermanœuvre, and to work out some device for "bringing her to her senses," as he called it, Cousin Martha's illness befell, and there was an end, for the time being, of all interviews and parleyings with Clara.

When, after that period of terrible anxiety and ex-

hausting fatigue, the good cousin, at last, was convalescent, and Clara's own mental and physical strength were prostrate, the physicians declared that few remedies or tonics would be more hopeful than total change of scene and climate, and a new visit to the sunny skies of Italy. All notion of theatrical exertion was left aside for the present, and thus Clara found herself kneeling again by Pia's couch in Florence, with the long, thin fingers under her silken braids, and the wan face mirroring itself in her moistened eyes.

It is not to be told with what gentle, delicate and loving patience the sick girl had drawn on her friend to the outpouring of that perfect confidence which at last she made of all that had passed between her and Mark Brandling.

Pia's keen power of discrimination had soon made her aware that some other cause than the anxiety and fatigue occasioned by Cousin Martha's illness must have wrought the change she saw upon Clara's countenance and bearing, so radiant once with beauty, genius, and living energy.

So instantaneously had she seized upon this truth, that after the first long look into Clara's deep eyes, nothing but hereditary Florentine prudence kept her from openly taxing her friend with having broken the promise to confide her first deep heartsorrow to herself. As it was, that astute and guarded wisdom which, in her, was yet united to a perfect sincerity of heart, sealed her lips.

"The same key which locks mine," she admonished herself, "must unlock Clara's."

Wherefore it was but little by little, that Pia felt the

bolts of her friend's secrecy yield and slide back at that gentle pressure of the key in her own firm, loving hand, until at last its inmost recesses lay open. Then, and not until then, she ventured on chiding Clara for not having kept the promise asked and obtained upon her sudden departure from Florence.

Clara now became the questioner in turn. What had been Pia's thought or apprehension in exacting it? Had it been the mere general forethought of friendship setting up beforehand for a motherless girl a city of refuge in another woman's heart? Or else, had Pia's penetration given a sort of prophetic intimation of sorrow to come?

From what quarter had she forecast its coming, and by what token discerned its distant form?

"In truth, Carissima, two very distinct considerations moved me; one clearly seen, it was personal to yourself; the other, felt rather than seen then; but which also is now clear enough to me. That was not personal."

"May I not know them both, Pia?"

"If you sincerely desire to know them, yes. But after what befell your affianced, for his open speaking, I fear the knowledge may estrange us."

"Pia, Pia! I have deserved that you should say so; but surely I have undergone some chastening of heart. Pity me!

"Pity you, Carissima? I love you, surely that is more. You know that other kind of love is not for me." She looked down along her wasted frame. In my own heart, I shall never know what mother's love is; I can be a sister heartwhole."

Clara passed her own rounded arms round the thin

body and pressed it to her own full breast, and kissed her passionately.

"Well, then, tell me first what you saw clearly: what was personal to me."

"When I first saw you, the life and working power, and enthusiasm which beamed from your whole person, even here in the quiet of my sick room, seemed to subdue my judgment of you. The Lord is very good to me,—I scarcely ever feel dark and cold within;—but such warmth and brightness from without as you brought with you I had not known before. I began by surrendering myself unreservedly to admiration and enjoyment."

"Ah!" said Clara, "I felt from the first moment that you were only too kind and good to me, dear Pia."

"Wait yet a little, Carissima, you may perhaps think that in truth I was neither kind nor good enough; but uncharitable and hard."

Clara shook her head.

"By-and-by I came to think you wilful and headstrong, and not without dangerous pride, though without a touch of meaner vanity. Oh! do not be offended, Carissima, at my speaking so: watching the faults and follies of my own wild heart has taught me to detect something of what is evil in others."

Clara pressed the hand which lay in hers.

"Your disregard of all the wishes of your father's old friend, that good old baronet at home in England, first put you in this light before me, when I heard from yourself under what circumstances you first took to this artist life. Nothing drove you to it as it has often driven others. You had an assured livelihood, 'un pane sicuro,' as we say in Italy."

"But the power, Pia, the gift? You know I had not deceived myself with a mere fancy. I thought it a duty to put it forth. For what else could God have given it me? To do nothing with it, would not that have been a reproach to Him for bestowing it in mockery, since it might not be used?" She said this with a rising excitement.

"Hush! dearest, you do not speak wisely now. There might have been some other use shown you for the gift as time went on. And to some He gives gifts and powers whilst He denies them the opportunity of exercise; perhaps to fit them by bearing with such denial for higher powers and holier gifts."

"It is very well to talk so, Pia; but if you had felt the throb, and stir, and impulse of such living energies of art within you as I have felt, you might have found it hard to take up with such a damping creed."

For some moments Pia answered nothing. She seemed to be solving a doubt within herself. Her lips parted as if about to speak, then closed again. A blush, as of shame at what she was about to say, came over her pale face. At last she said so modestly, so touchingly—

"If I had felt the throb and stir, Carissima! Why! sometimes I have fancied that here and here"—the thin hands lightly touched her forehead and her breast—"The Lord had put powers, and gifts, and energies, many and strong. You see what I am"—again she looked down along her wasted frame—"and you see where He has laid me; yet, when I am wise I do not think He has cramped my true being after all!"

Clara gathered herself and knelt reverently as one

might before some shrine, and put her hands together first, and said, "Pardon, Pia, pardon! May He too forgive me!" Then she covered her face with both hands, and hid all upon the sick girl's breast, and sobbed aloud.

Pia caressed the noble head as it lay on her. When Clara was a little calmer, the young countess resumed:

"I thought, also, Carissima, that though sometimes you seemed to treat applause with a magnificent disdain, there was mere pride in that. You spoke much of your art as glorious; and first I thought you only spoke of the splendour of its harmonies, of those radiant glories of music, which seem to have some share in the true glories of heaven. But I came to suspect, in time, that the witchery of applause and admiration in the crowded theatre had some hold on you. Perhaps the suspicion was unjust; but it was that of one who loves you, and is jealous for your true nobleness—as I think also that poor Marzocco was:" she added, with a faint smile.

Clara uttered no word, but nestled down to her side again.

"And as I believed that yours was a soul worth chastening—indeed what human soul is not?—I forecast some coming sorrow, and I longed to share it with you."

"How shall I thank you, Pia?" said the kneeling girl in broken voice. "But you have not yet told me all. You said there was another consideration, which was not personal."

"Yes, one, of which an instinct was then only beginning to creep over me; but on which a flood of light has since been poured in."

"You will not hide it from me?"

"No, not if you sincerely desire to know; but I have even more fear of your breaking from me now, than when I made bold to speak freely about yourself. Get up, Carissima, and sit back in the chair there, and look me steadily in the face."

Clara did as she requested.

"What I said just now in condemnation of your adopting this artist-life of yours, touched only upon your own peculiar circumstances, had the calling been ever so respectable."

Clara winced at the word.

"I should have said that your embracing it, in spite of your oldest and best friend, was resisting, not embracing, the true vocation the Lord was giving you. I knew little or nothing of theatrical life, yet when I came to think of it, with my strong interest in you, I had misgivings that the calling itself was no way worthy of respect."

"What! you too, Pia—I beg pardon, Contessa Pia dei Guari—are you, too, going to insult me with that?"

She stood up, a cold hard expression settling upon her fair countenance, and looked not at Pia, but, as it were, into vacancy beyond her.

"Chiara, Chiara mia, Carissima!" said the sick girl, "sit down, only sit down again, and look me in the face!"

She stood a second irresolute, then sat down. The large, dark, sunken eyes of the Florentine seemed to search out her soul with entreaty; and with a slow longing action, Pia's lank arms were stretched out. A might of attractive tenderness, which to resist were

awful, drew Clara, drew her towards those eyes and arms.

Again upon her breast, Pia heard Clara murmur, "Oh, forgive me!"

After a while she rose once more, and sat down in the chair facing the sick couch.

"I am not convinced, as yet, of anything but this, that I myself am more unworthy of your respect than I had thought. Yet, I pray you, tell me about my calling; what poured in on you that flood of light of which you spoke? If you will kindly answer me, whatever you may say, I promise, at least, to be rude and fierce no more."

"I had never been to the theatre myself, Clara, before the time when you left Florence last. My poor spine had made it impossible. So I had no impressions but what were vague and contradictory to go by. You remember how much better and stronger I felt when poor Orazio was with us that same season. I felt so for some time after. One night in the following spring, my mother proposed that I should go with her to see a favourite opera. You know, dearest, how I love music, and some remembrance of yourself increased my wish to do so. I went. Nothing, however, struck me concerning what I speak of, till the dancing began"——

"Ah!" cried the English girl, "you need say no more of that, Pia; I always held it in detestation. Not for worlds on worlds would I have ever stooped to be a public dancer."

"You need not tell me so," she answered. "I could have cried with shame and indignation to see a woman, a sister-woman, affront the gaze of that crowded house in such debasement."

"But, Pia, what has that to do with me? I need have no contact with the thing, nor any with the person."

"Are not those very words sufficient answer, Clara? You, as prima donna, are the prop and stay of a whole system of entertainment; one part of which, although it is not yours, consists in that from contact of which you shrink. Even if you should make known to those immediately around you, your disapproval of what shocks you, what of that? Do the hundreds who applaud you in one scene, and the first dancer in the next, draw such distinctions between what you sanction and what she does? And then, can you endure, you that have a sisterly heart, you that are a member of one company with her, to wrap yourself up in self-satisfaction and indifference, and say, 'let me soar upon the sublimities of this dramatic art, and that poor creature exhibit side by side its degradations?'"

Clara was not a little moved; yet she kept silence.

"When I came home that night I was haunted by grief to think that one whom I loved, as I love you, should breathe an atmosphere tainted by such a shame. No arguments, I felt, could reconcile me to that from which the immediate impulse of my heart bid me thus recoil. Then I determined to know more. I wrote to Orazio; I entreated him to tell me all that his greater knowledge of the outside world had taught him concerning the ordinary position of actresses, and the circumstances of the ordinary theatrical life. You know my brother. He has his faults, poor fellow!—his own errors, and is paying dearly for them. But he has a noble and a simple heart, a generous and a pure mind. So when I had heard all that he had to say, I was

in doubt no longer, and began to pray for your deliverance."

"One more question, dear Pia, if, after my insolence I may still call you so. When you conceived that you saw this point clear, why did you not write to me, instead of waiting until, perhaps, after some great sorrow, I should fulfil my promise of opening my heart to you?"

"Because, Carissima, come here now; kneel down, and let me hold your dear head in my own fondling way—yes, just so. Because, Carissima, I feared that till the Lord should crush a little the pride of a headstrong will,—no! you shall not jump up and look angry now!—my words would be worse than useless."

"Ah, Pia! the event has shown that those dark eyes of yours had read me through and through."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WADY NATROON. A REVELATION.

THERE is in perfumes a singular power to bring reminiscences. Even if borne faint and delicate upon the conveying air, they will recall, sometimes more forcibly than sights and sounds, a whole train of associations, and tint the retina of the fancy with vivid images of distant places and days bygone. It was, however, no faint and delicately perfumed air which was wafted up the Nile banks into the wooden hut where Mark Brandling was sitting in the hot Egyptian noon-day; the breeze was heavy scented with the delicious odour of the flowering bean-fields. Egyptian sights, and sounds, and smells, are rarely suggestive of old England; but this breath of the bean-flowers is ever so.

The dairy farm, and its garden astir with summer bees, and the snow-balls of the gueldre-rose lolloping against the lattice windows, and the wondrous emerald velvet of the water meadows, and the sleepy green of the thick-leaved woodlands at Wymerton,—how the perfume of the bean-fields wafted that picture in upon his mind!

Then the sound of hammers came in along with that sweet heavy scent—of hammers, whose noisy blows ring hollow upon iron cylinders in riveting. So had he heard them, hundreds of times, on his way down to the workshops at Newton-forge.

He looks out at the open window, and first of all an English sight greets him—the rugged, red-whiskered, but honest and pleasant face of the Yorkshireman, Joe Tanner.

He is leaning his broad back against the low, wooden pillar which props the verandah. His shirt-sleeves are above his elbows as of old; he wears stout corduroys still, and thick-ribbed, gray, woollen stockings; his highlows are tight laced as ever, and the soles of them a miracle of thickness in leather, of ingenious distribution in little horse-shoes, and barn-door nails, and tips of iron.

There is a black-brown man, with wolfish eyes and a scrubby pretence of beard upon his chin, squatted cross-legged at Tanner's feet. He wears a rough, serge haïk, or Arab cloak, about his shoulders, as black-brown as his own skin. A twisted rope of camel's hair binds on his head a coarse cotton kerchief, which may once have been white; the longer folds hang down upon his neck and shoulders, which they shade from the blaze of the sun, and from under the shorter folds in front those wolfish eyes regard Joe Tanner. Their admiration is seemingly divided between the strapping proportions of that herculean "ganger" and the marvellous construction of his boots. They look up into the broad, bronzed face, ruddy for all the bronzing, and then travel slowly down the big frame till the boots are reached.

Their owner nudges another black-brown man squatted down near him, as are some five or six others; but they with no haïks or handkerchiefs; with poor cotton shirts for all clothing, and on their heads skull-caps of an indescribably coarse felt. These are a petty sheik of Bedoweens, from the Natroon desert, and some fellaheen or settled Arabs from its bordering villages, his kinsmen.

"Shooft," quoth the sheik to his next neighbour in an under-tone, "Shooft el Râghil (look at the man); Râghil keteer hoo (a big bit of a man that)!"

"Keteer! ya beebee!—Big, I believe you," chanted the fellaheen in chorus.

"Shooft el Baboosh," resumed the pure-blooded wandering son of Ishmael, "look at the boot. Kôl hadeed!—Iron every bit of it."

"Ya Umhammed! hadeed keteer!—Iron, and lots of it, in the prophet's name!" echoed the chorus.

"Had it? old feller," said Yorkshire Joe, with a gravity as imperturbable as the Arab's. "Had it?—oh! ah! where I had the pair of boots you mean? Why, them's Lancasheere make, them is; and I bought 'em at Blackburn."

"Tayib!" replied the sheik, as if he understood every word.

"Ah, Tar-yeeb! Yes, mon, I know what that's boun' to mean. Tar-yeeb is good in your crack; an' ye're just upo' raight there. Main tidy clogs them is, tidy clogs."

"Tai-tee glogs!" repeated the Arab, with the imitative facility of his race.

"Just so," said Tanner, without a vestige of a smile. "An' I'll tell ee whot, Muster Alley, or Hassan, or

What's-yer-name, if ye could getten yer men to tak oop wi' sich for their feet, and spades instead o' them kittle-some hoe things, and barrers for moving muck wi' instead o' them baskets, there'd be a chance of making navvies oot o' 'em sich as I canna see noo."

"Eywa! Tayib!" said the sheik, much edified.

The colloquy was interrupted by a whistle and a scream that not only might have been, but was, pure "Lancasheere," as Joe had it. They came from the lungs of a brazen monster, with "Bolton-le-Moors" in brass upon its flanks, and the up-train from Alexandria at its fiery heels.

"Station-master here, Joe?" inquired Mark, as he came out of his room, the black-brown men rising, sheik and all, and shuffling out of his way with a respectful "Salaam Hawajee!"

"No, sir! Muster Mackenzie's o' t'other side to see about some troocks as was injured last night, I reckon."

"Well, then, some one must see to this train, for the assistant's ill, and there's always a good deal of confusion on the outward mail-days. I suppose I must go myself." And Mark went out, followed by the Yorkshireman.

"Kafr el Ais! Kafr el Ais!" cried Italian guards, Swiss waiters at the refreshment-room, Arab ticket-porters, and others, upon the opposite Nile bank to that on which were Brandling and Joe Tanner.

Out poured the passengers, to get their dinner and to cross the river; for the grand bridge, with its massive piers of stone and huge spandrils of iron, which Mark was come to put across the old mysterious flood of Misraïm, according to the designs of one of the great engineers of the age, was incomplete, and a steamboat

with the silver-crescent flag was puffing and blowing on the water, ready to ferry them over.

"Look alive there, Bottlegreen, you've not half wire enough in your boot-heels for a rifleman. Beg your pardon, though, forgot the leg. Holloa you, Ali, Ali, dragoman, look sharp after the gun-cases; see they don't go on with the heavy luggage. And, Bottlegreen, do you think that soldier servant of yours knows the name of the hotel at Alexandria? Tell him your heavy chests may go on board the 'P. and O.' boat at once, if they'll take 'em; and he can keep the portmanteaus and bags for us with him at Zech's—Zech's hotel, mind, on the square. We shall be down in six days or a week, at the furthest."

The young man addressed as Bottlegreen, a well-set-up soldierly figure, who had a stout oak sapling in his hand, and walked with a slight limp, went down the platform, in compliance with these directions, until he came upon his servant, whose straight back, smart bearing, and military salute to his master, told sufficiently what was his calling in life, though he, too, wore plain clothes. He repeated the injunctions as they had been given him; his man standing at "attention" during their delivery, and saluting again at his final "Yes, sir."

In the meanwhile the first speaker had inquired for the station-master, and had learned that he was now gone across again to see to the transfer of the mail-boxes.

"His house am over oder side, Hawajee," said Ali, the dragoman. "He stay dere all this aftnoon maybe. We better take little boat, go over and see."

"Come along, Billy," said the civilian, a much bigger,

burlier man than his military brother, wearing a portentous beard, an ornament not conceded in those days to the visage of the British warrior; "come along, old fellow; we'll look up the station-master. Bob Snapper told me he could put us in the way to those salt-lakes or soda-water lakes, where the ducks are. No, no, Ali, you bring over the gun-cases and saddle-bags by-and-by; we shan't want you to interpret, though I believe the station-master *is* a Scotchman! Shove away, you Markabee, you boatman there, and let's see how the Nile ferrymen handle an oar."

When they reached the opposite side they scuffled up the steep sandy bank, the big man insisting upon his brother's leaning on his arm, and helping him up tenderly.

"It won't do to play tricks with that game leg of yours, my boy. To tell the truth, I've half a mind you shan't go duck shooting with it."

"Nonsense, Chet, I should be glad enough to go duck shooting *without* it; but as I can't manage that, I must go, game leg and all."

"Well, there's one comfort, we shall ride there, and you can skulk in a reed hut, or behind a bank, or somewhere, whilst I and the 'waleds,' as boys are called here, put up the quack-quacks, and send 'em over in your direction."

"I dare say I shall do first-chop somehow."

By this time they were near the station, and the first man upon whom they lighted was Joe Tanner.

"A man and a half, that navvy-looking chap!" said the burly brother, admiringly; thus endorsing the opinion expressed by the sheik half an hour ago.

"Make a fine grenadier," quoth the officer; "too tall and square for the Rifles."

"I say, my good fellow, can we see the station-master? Is that he with the white muslin round his wide-awake?"

"No, sir. I dunno where Muster Mackenzie may be just noo. He's put aboot a bit, I reckon, t'l train's gone oot."

"Who is that gentleman, then: only a passenger, or a railway official?"

"Yon's Muster Brandling, sir; the chief engineer o' th' works," answered Joe Tanner, with something of dignified reserve in his manner.

"Brandling! Brandling! Let me see. Brandling? No, surely, it can't be: yet it's the cut of him." And as they crossed over the rails and came near enough to make out his features, Digby turned round to his brother and exclaimed: "It's he, though, for a thousand pounds; it's the rascally Radical, as the Cornishman said."

He walked up quickly to him, and held out his hand:

"Well, we are in luck to stumble upon you. I don't know when I've been so pleased to come across a fellow."

It was not in nature to refuse to grasp a fellow-countryman's hand so cordially held out, at such a distance from home; but Mark stared as he did so, and it was evident that he did not recognise the man who hailed him so heartily.

"You don't seem to know me," he said, still holding the hand in his. "The first time we shook hands was just inside the gates at Verona;" and he gave a grip

therewith, which, perhaps, better than any other token, brought back the time and place and speaker into Mark's mind, who then vigorously returned it.

"Mr. Digby, I know you now. It's the beard, I suppose, which alters you. Mr. Digby, I am"——

"Oh, bother the Mister. Haven't we pulled in a four together, and put out a street on fire together? My name's Digby, man—Chetwynde Digby: late profession, boating-man of St. Sylvester's, Oxford; present occupation, tourist and sportsman; future prospects, country squire and county magistrate. And this," he said, turning to his brother, "is Lieutenant William Digby, of Her Majesty's Rifles, my brother, the first man"—he said this with affectionate pride—"the first man of the whole British army who was into the Sikh batteries in India, the other day, where he got a game leg for his pains by a cut of a tulwar, and I believe is to get his Major's rank for it in the next brevet after he purchases his company. But, these necessary formalities at an end, you will find it shorter and pleasanter to call him Bottlegreen, as I do. No soldier should be ashamed of his regimental colour. Stop a minute, though; I have not introduced you. Billy, this is an old friend of mine—Mark Brandling, man of the people, mechanical genius, chief engineer of these works, I'm told, and I believe chief leader of the Chartists. Now let's get into the bungalow, as these Indians call it, and, though it's taking a liberty, I would suggest pale ale."

That favourite Egyptian, as well as Indian, beverage making its appearance, together with all the procurable provision for "tiffin," mutual inquiries and explanations followed.

It appeared that Digby, senior, had "been up the Nile," in the usual way, with Bob Snapper, of Brasenose, and another. There had been the inevitable crocodile adventure below Keneh, and the wonderful "bag' of pelican and spoonbill between Thebes and Assouân. That, however, was little.

"We've been ever so far up, some days above Chartoom, up in a country where there's trees and monkeys in 'em, as well as downright 'niggers' under the shade. Bob Snapper and the other man are up there still, with two-ounce rifles and conical balls with steel tips. They've no notion of coming back till they've seen an elephant and shot him, and perhaps a giraffe into the bargain. Heigho," sighed the big man, with a suspiration from the lower depths of his capacious chest, "This is the sort of thing that comes of having brotherly feelings."

"Brotherly feelings?" re-echoed Mark, with a puzzled stare.

"To be sure," said Digby; "I've sacrificed my elephant and immolated my giraffe upon that family altar. I got a letter in Chartoom, which spoke of Bottlegreen coming home invalided, *viâ* Suez, this month, so I started down in country boats for Cairo to meet him."

"Well," said the rifleman, with the kindliest light of gratitude in his eye; "I've had a trouncing or two from you before now, Chet., but we never *were* quite like the two murdering brothers, with the hard names, in the Greek play."

"Bottlegreen, I am swindled, and hate you worse than they did one another. If I'd known your leg was

well enough to go duck-shooting, do you think I'd ever have"——

"Yes, you would, old fellow. But never mind; you shall go back to Bengal with me when my leave is up, and I'll tender compensation in the way of tiger; there now."

"Ah, well, tiger, perhaps, as you say; and Ceylon's not far from India for elephant. But if Bob brings down a giraffe, the brute will lie heavy on my stomach for many a year."

"Ha, ha! There's room enough for it, legs and all, in that barrel of yours, Chet!"

"Come, none of your broad mess-room jokes upon me, Bottlegreen," retorted the wide-girthed.

As for starting for the salt lakes that day, the thing was out of the question. There must be beasts got, mules or camels, or something, and some provisions cooked, and a guide found, and so forth.

"By the way, talking of a guide, there was the very man you want hanging about here this morning. He came in about our hiring some half-dozen of his camels for carrying rubble to the masons at the bridge."

"Tanner! Joe Tanner! What's become of that Hassan Abou Habseh, that sheik fellow that was handling the tips of your boots just now? Send him up this way, if you can come across him, will you?"

"Ay, sir."

"The man lives in the Wâdy Natroon," said Mark, "when he lives anywhere: and I believe his tribe are down that way now with their few cattle, to pasture them on the young rushes where your ducks hide."

The sheik made his appearance, and, with Mark's

scrupulous respect for other men's feelings, was invited to sit upon the divan and take a thimble-full of coffee Eastern-wise. But he preferred to squat upon the carpeted floor, and, Bedoween as he might be, suggested "pale ale," as the boating-man had done.

"Booza!" said he, "it is beer!"—not forbidden, therefore, to a Mussulman.

"Booza, indeed!" cried Digby; "I dare say you've tasted that booza they brew here, Brandling. I did once, at Siout; it's like sweet wort turned sour, with an infusion of soapsuds and a handful of fuller's earth in it. Ugh!"

Mark's acquisitions in Arabic, though not extensive, were sufficient to make the sheik understand that the English "Hawajees" desired his guidance on a shooting party to the Wâdy, and that there was a hopeful prospect of "backsheesh." The Ishmaelite professed his perfect readiness to conduct the party, and spoke cheerfully of the sporting prospects.

"Fee batt, fee wuzz, keteer keteer."

"I can't quite stand their calling a duck a 'bat,'" said Digby; "but that word 'wuzz,' for goose, is fine; and they've a way of doubling the 'w' as well as the 'z' in pronouncing it, that's capital."

"Fee haloof!" continued the sheik, "fee gazal!"

"Haloof, what's that?" inquired the rifleman.

"Wild boar," said his brother.

"Oh, for my pet nag, Selim, and an Indian hog spear!"

"Pigsticking, eh? Can't quite be done on a camel, young man. And if Selim *was* here, there's that leg of yours."

"Never mind, I must have it out of the ducks and wuzz I suppose."

For farther details and preliminaries the sheik was referred to Ali, the dragoman.

"I'll tell you what, Brandling," said Digby, all at once, "you'd better come duck-shooting with us, my boy; the bridge won't tumble into the Nile meanwhile. One don't like parting on the spot with a fellow one's met in this way; and we could talk over old times in Venice as we rode along."

Little recked he of the strange medley of feeling stirred by the proposal in the breast of the man to whom he spoke. "Old times in Venice! Memories so sweet, so sad! Perhaps the talk would light on her—talk how painful, yet how delicious!"

He hesitated.

"Now don't let those tons of girders weigh upon your mind, man, as you're half inclined to do. They'd be worse than Bob's giraffe on mine, horns and hoofs and all. You come along duck-shooting. The shareholders can wait a week for their bridge, I'll warrant."

"It's all right about the girders, as it happens," said the other with a smile: it had a queer twitch about it, that smile, as when a man is fearing he may cry. "We happen to be short of them, and the fresh supply is on board a Liverpool screw yet, in the harbour at Alexandria."

"Hooray! then, you're the man for us! Bottlegreen! the Radical's coming duck-shooting."

"Hardly that I think; I don't know the butt end of a fowling-piece from the muzzle for sporting purposes; but if your locks want oiling or picking to pieces, my

old smithcraft may stand us in some stead. But besides the pleasure of your company, I should be glad to visit the Coptic monasteries by the Natroon lakes. I should like to pick up a manuscript."

"A Coptic manuscript! Are you keeper of the Bodleian library as well as engineer of the works and Chartist-in-chief!"

"No; but a dear friend of mine, a friend of yours too, would prize one as a treasure, if I could light on it —and you should take it home with you."

"Take any thing home for you, by all means; but I can't think who the friend is. I don't know many fellows who can construe Coptic."

"One, at all events, the Rev. Frederick Ingram."

"Fred Ingram, to be sure! So you've kept up your Venetian acquaintance with him?"

"Yes; and improved it. I have no friend like him in the world."

"An out-and-out good fellow, Fred, true as steel, with a conscience like a polished mirror of it;" said Digby, earnestly. "If he hasn't made a real first-rate parson of the right sort, the Bishops will have a long way to look for such another bit of raw material. Working-men and parsons don't always hit it off together as well as one could wish; but I wouldn't give much for one that couldn't find out he was in good hands with Fred Ingram."

"Well, the working-men at Newton-forge have found out something like it, I can promise you."

The next morning they were off—riding along the causeway on top of the dykes which intersect the fat plains of the Delta. The heavy-scented bean-fields

were on one hand, the bright green basseem or Egyptian clover fields on the other. The golden-crested hoopooes, with short dancing flight kept with them, and out of the bushes of nebk and tamarisk, doves, with shot-silk breasts, threw themselves suddenly upon the wing.

Long lines of palm trees rose against the low horizon, and a white telegraph tower gleamed from space to space in the hot light. Overhead, the sky was intensely blue, "as blue as the waters of Garda or *her* deep eyes," thought Mark. But out on the left hand, down nearer to the earth line, hung a mist or haze; it was the sand-cloud over the great desert of the Wâdy raised by the same wind which fanned them as they went, and made the palm feathers wave.

"A good deal of the Deccan in all this," said the rifleman. "I know these trees here by the village very well; that is the peepul, and that a sort of sycamore, common enough in India, over the little Santon's tomb, where passers-by have left those fluttering rags of cloth and linen. Indeed the whole turn-out, tree, tomb, rags, and all, might be within five hundred yards of the Ganges as well as of the Nile. What do they call those white birds with the long legs in the field there to the left?"

"Abou, something, I forget," said Mark.

"Ah, well, they're just the Indian paddy-birds, and quite familiar to me. And look at that wretched earth-scratcher of a wooden plough left in the furrow there, Hindoo to the backbone."

"Hold hard, you fellows!" and a roar of laughter from the elder Digby interrupted his brother's reminiscences.

"What's wrong in front, my boy?" calls out the soldier.

Joe Tanner was the matter. Mark had brought him as a personal retainer and henchman, partly at the suggestion of Digby, and partly at that of his Arab admirer, Hassan Abou Habseh.

Joe was by no means an equestrian. Mules were too like horses for him, and he refused to mount one. He tried one of his friend Hassan's camels; but the mere operation of the brute's action in rising from its knees, which first pitched him forward, almost impaling him on the wooden peak of the pack saddle; then backward, almost perforating his spine with a similar instrument in the contrary direction, warned him to desist from the attempt. This was an unexpected difficulty, and had nearly put a stop to the Yorkshireman's expedition. Abou Habseh, however, unwilling to forego the company of such a "râghil keteer," had undertaken to overrule the objection, and at the last moment, had produced, for solution of the enigma, an undersized, one-eyed, whity-brown donkey, with a limp in the off foreleg and a scarlet amulet round its neck. Amidst laughter and indignation Mark and the Digbys had rejected the offer; but Hassan, with unmoved gravity, had protested that for speed, no less than for endurance on this desert-journey, the unpromising whity-brown would be found equal, if not superior, to the more showy quadrupeds; and the question had been practically settled by Joe Tanner himself, who, perched upon the creature's extreme hind-quarters, ambled off in front of the procession, his long legs only kept from ploughing the ground by keeping them stiff in front, with the highlows at a rigid right angle.

But in descending a precipitous bank at a place where

some cross canal of irrigation cut the causeway, the posterior accumulation of weight had proved too much for the maintenance of equilibrium, and whity-brown's unshodden hoofs slipping in the steep sand, the luckless Joe, with his long-eared steed, had rolled to the bottom and fallen plump into a procession of closely-veiled fellaheen women, who, with earthen pot on head or shoulder, were returning from the watering-place. Great was the confusion, loud the screaming, and terrible the scolding, when it was ascertained that besides the affront to their womanly dignity, and the spilling of the water, a great "bellass," or water-jar, was utterly smashed.

The grave explanations, however, of Abou Habseh, the more voluble objurgations of the dragoman—and still better, a handful of piastres tendered by Mark, appeased the female storm, and, without further adventure, the cavalcade at last reached the ferry, where they were to recross the Nile.

As for the anticipated talk about old times in Venice, as yet there had been none of it. For the elder Digby had ridden on in front, cracking jokes in a strange compound of English and Arabic with Hassan and Joe. Mark had ridden with the young officer, and very pleasant company he had found him. If I have not wholly failed in giving indications of the character of Brandling, my readers will have felt that though he neither was, nor wished to be, a fighting-man, there was no little of the true soldier-spirit in him. William Digby was no unfavourable specimen of what a young British officer should be, and happily, not seldom is. With all the generous temper of his brother Chet-

wynde, he had less of the boating-man's rollicking habit and slang. With an intellect which he had in boyhood cultivated more assiduously than his elder, the sense of responsibility laid on him by the habit of alternate obedience and command, was considerably stronger and more lively in him than in the other. Chetwynde was as brave as his father, the old Peninsular soldier, had been. William could not beat him there; but the necessity of husbanding other men's lives as well as of exposing his own, on principle, not by mere impulse, had wrought in the younger brother that nobleness of a chastened valour, which is so admirable in soldiers. He had seen enough of war, too, to have gained earnestness in facing its tremendous realities, without having seen so much of it as to have contracted the callousness of some old campaigners. In his conversation, as they rode along, he had passed from the casual and superficial reminiscences excited by natural objects or common oriental customs, to larger and deeper considerations.

He did not take a politician's view of conquest and dominion. That, perhaps, was hardly to be expected. But he was not one of those who could be satisfied with no other result of conquest and dominion than collection of revenue, or even the bare administration of an experimental justice.

"India wants two conquests," he said; "one by the sword, another by the hammer."

He might have added, "a third by the book." I do not suppose he would have denied this had it been propounded; but, perhaps, considering the school of thought in which he had been trained, it would be too much to expect that he should propound it himself.

"I have had a feeling many times that I should be better satisfied at our fellows going first, if there were a greater certainty of your fellows following close after."

And then he told Mark of the great things which might be done, not only by large public works in India, but by diffusion of sounder knowledge and readier skill in what concerns the commoner arts and conveniences of life.

This was a point at which the conversation truly became a dialogue, for the soldier gave such hints of what was wanted as his own intelligent observation had made him surmise, and the mechanic filled up the outline from the ampler and exacter resources of his own practical knowledge of what might be done to meet these wants. So they came to the ferry, and there they slept that night. The next overtook them in the desert, the round red disc of the sun going down suddenly behind the sandy, gravelly waves of that dry sea. They gathered armfuls of the withered thorny scrub, and lit a fire to boil their coffee and to roast a couple of ducks, which Digby had brought down, right and left, before they had turned their backs upon the cultivated land.

When the cooking was over, Hassan stamped the fire out, being a cautious man, as the wolfish eye seemed to tell, and preferring to lie about in the dark when camping in desolate wâdies and other such places, where a Bedoween is not always sure of his company.

The boating-man was indignant at the proceeding.

"Why, there's nine or ten yards of big Englishman here, inclusive of our friend the navvy, to say nothing of Hassan Cut-throat himself, Ali dragoman, and the light brigade of donkey-boys. Under Bottlegreen's

skilful professional handling there's more than enough of us to fight a whole tribe of Beni Ragamuffin, or whatever their names may be!"

But the deed was done, the fire out, and the company in general too tired to gather more scrub for another. There was nothing left for it but to grumble a bit, light cigars and chibouques, converse a little in the dark, and then, rolled up in plaids, capotes, or haïks, to lie at full length on driftsand, and get off to sleep.

When the moon was up the march was resumed under pleasanter auspices than when the fierce heat was overhead and the mirage all round. Eldritch and ghastly was the sheen upon the chain of pools and lakes, when discerned at last, far off, in that terrible wilderness. The waxing day-light brought little more cheerfulness than the waning moon. Rocky crests, toothed and jagged, rose up everywhere from shifting beds of the finest sand. The hoofs of the beasts found no hold in this lightest yet heaviest of soils to tread on. Their riders dismounted. Abou Habseh, with his old pair of shuffling papooshes, and the "waleds" or driver-boys, with their bare, brown toes, had singular advantage here over Joe Tanner with those formidable Lancashire highlows. By-and-by the lie of the land slopes down for good and all towards the lakes. A green skirting of rushes and of leafy shrubs here and there, now relieves the weariness of the eye with its charitable hue. They are close down amongst the rushes now, the salt in flakes crackling under their feet as they pick their way through the outside edges of the lesser pools. Soon they are plashing at the dull, heavy water's edge through a thicket of tall bulrushes; and—quack, quack, quack,

whirr, go the ducks—and bang, bang from the ready double-barrel of Digby, with bang, bang again from the rifleman's, and the day's sport is begun.

Mark, who is no shot, as he had truly said, turns aside with Abou Habseh; and emerging from the vegetation, they make their way to a wide, rounded knoll, of no great eminence, from which, however, there is an extended view over the chain of lakes, which really now begin almost to smile under the increasing sunshine. In front of them, at some two miles distance from the opposite bank, gleam the white walls of the twin monasteries, Amba Bishoi and Dayr Sooriani; some four miles to the left, those of Dayr Baramoos; behind all, glaring with hot, scorching, yellow and brown tints, stretches away and away, until lost in the horizon, the great pathless desert of Lybia.

On the mound itself stands the spring mansion of that small chieftain and ruler of men, Hassan Abou Habseh—not a tent nor a collection of them—for this is his pleasant season of "villegiatura;" and what with burrowing in the mound itself, and raising parapets of mud from the pool's edges, and weaving screens of reed and sticks, and keeping down, with a stone or two, a clumsy thatch of rushes, he has contrived to hut himself and family as commodiously and, all things considered, as coolly as could be expected.

Under any circumstances there is something pleasant and winsome about a pastoral scene, a semblance of primitive richness and abundance. Here were lowing cows and oxen; here buffalo calves and their ungraceful mothers; here, two or three camel mares with their newly-dropped foals. Cocks and hens, too, were flutter-

ing, and scratching, and cackling announcement of succulent fresh eggs. Here were earthen pans of new milk, both from the common and the buffalo cow; here skins of haleeb, the sour curds so prized by every Bedoween palate; and here a wooden platter with soft, white zibdeh, or saltless butter; just such produce and platter of an Arab dairy were in the hand of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, when to weary, fainting Sisera she "brought forth butter in a lordly dish."

Fatmeh and Aïssa were bidden to bestir themselves, as also the wondrous withered grandmother or two. The little half-clad girlies ran off to hide themselves; but their brisker brothers, "the waleds," soon got reconciled to Mark, and were busy in helping Ali dragoman and the donkey-boys unpacking the canteen. After three or four hours, returned the sportsmen, half-dead with heat; but well pleased with their "bag." There were "batt keteer," as the sheik declared, "a power o' doock, sir," as Joe, who had stuck to them throughout, announced to the engineer.

What a breakfast the whole party made of it! Joe took down one whole kid-skin of the sour curds to himself alone.

"Well, it's mighty pleasant lying about here," quoth Digby, some hour or two and several cigars after the past was ended.

"A trifle sunny, fastidious critics might object. The ducks are prime sport and in plenty, and we met a 'waled' in the thicket, who deposed to 'wuzz' on the upper lake. It's plain we can make out two or three days of it. But we can't keep intruding upon the hospitality of an Arab country gentleman, nor dis-

turbing his Mussulman domestic happinesss in this way much longer. So, perhaps, we had better take it easy till the afternoon, and then ride over to the monasteries, and settle down there, if the Copts will have us."

The walls of Amba Bishoi are lofty, massive, and unbroken by any architectural incident, plastered with white plaster outside, which reminded the rifleman of "Indian chunam," he said. A big, square tower frowns over one part of them, being a place of last refuge for the poor monks in very troublous times, and having in successive stories chapels for sanctuary, when all in the courts below must be forsaken. Under frown of this tower, down partly buried in the sand, which surges right up to the foot of these huge walls, there is a doorway flanked by tremendous granite millstones, which, wheeled into the narrow doorway, would preclude all passage effectually. From a rudely-shaped archway of great height dangles a palm-rope, attached to a bell upon the upper parapet. Hereat the boating-man pulled vigorously, until a black-turbaned brother, appearing above, demanded of him thence who the party might be, and what was their will of the monks?

"Christians, Englishmen, travellers, in want of hospitality!"

And presently the cumbrous gate is opened, and, creeping through the narrow doorway, they find themselves within the monastery walls; the gommos or ruler (a corruption of the Greek hegoumenos) advancing with several of his brethren to welcome them. Delighted enough seemed he to greet these rare visitants from the outer—and from so distant an outer world. Before night was fully come, Digby declared that he felt quite

as much at home here as if he were back in the old "library-quad" at St. Sylvester's.

The next day's dawn saw him and his brother off to the lakes again, with Tanner and the dragoman, Mark being left to cultivate, by himself, the acquaintance of the kindly Copts, and to endeavour to compass the acquisition of a manuscript. In both objects he was successful, and owed, singularly enough, his success in the latter to his mechanical skill and handicraft.

There was but one manuscript of any value in the hands of the fraternity, a "Kittab-e-Sellimeh," or Copto-Arabic glossary, and with this, even for very liberal backsheesh, the old gommos was unwilling to part. But the draw-well in the great court-yard, an object of the first necessity and interest to his community, whose very existence often depends upon its condition, had an apparatus for raising water, which the crass stupidity of an Abyssinian lay-brother had, some few days back, injured seriously. The repair of it was beyond the rude carpentering powers of any man within those walls; and to fetch a skilled workman all the way from Teraneh to mend it, would be a matter of great trouble and expense. Judge of the incredulous delight of the poor gommos, when Mark announced that he could not only repair the apparatus, but improve upon and simplify the construction.

"Do this, oh marvellous English Hawajee," he cried in the exuberance of his feelings, "and without paying a piastre, the 'Kittab-e-Sellimeh' is thine!"

Mark set to work with a will, and told his friends not to hurry the duck-shooting.

Inside the massive, enclosing wall of Amba Bishoi

there runs all round what in military parlance William Digby called a high banquette. It is a narrow stone terrace or walk, reached at different points from the garden by rude flights of steps. Thence looking outwards the eye may rest upon the neighbouring pile of Dayr Sooriani, or wander over the immensity of the sand-sea on every side. Looking inwards, you take a bird's-eye view of the monastery itself; you count the domes of its chapel, and trace the outline of the nave and aisles; you mark its whitewashed belfry of rude construction; you follow the intricacies of the little water rills in and out of the garden beds, where a few onions and cucumbers grow; you raise your sight up along the tall stems of the few palm-trees, and take pleasure to see the burnished gold of the sun-setting, inlaid with the delicate tracery of the spiky frondlets, dark against the evening sky.

Here it befell that, pacing to and fro, there came to Mark's ear from Digby's lips the dreaded but desired mention of Clara's name.

"Have you ever seen anything, since those old Venetian days, of Miss Jerningham?" Then, happily, without pausing for an answer—"She was a glorious girl! Straightforward, generous, and true. Upon my word, I believe she was as good as she was handsome—no small thing to say of her. She was too good for an opera singer—I've often thought it since. Not but what singers would be respectable out and out, if they were all of a piece with her. But she was artist to the backbone, or else, I suppose, she might have been a parson's wife?"

"A parson's wife!" re-echoed Mark, in utter amazement.

"Ah! to be sure. Mrs. Ingram—Mrs. Frederick Ingram. That poor fellow was over head and ears in love with her at Venice. Didn't you know that?"

Mark was speechless. Presently he contrived to mutter—

"I really wasn't aware."

"Why, what a blind buzzard you must have been, man! That cunning chap, Win—you remember Windlesham?—detected the symptoms within two days of our arrival."

But Mark's agitation was increasing; he could not answer by any sound. He turned upon his heel, and walked rapidly to the nearest flight of steps, down which he strode, and disappeared under the palm and nebk trees.

"What's up?" said Digby, aloud. "I do believe and declare the Radical's gone mad! A case of sunstroke tinkering that draw-well!"

"Ingram! Ingram!" Mark was thinking. "I had placed my thought of you very high. Far too low for what you are, however!"

He called to mind after what delicate fashion his friend had first given him to understand that he knew and sympathized with his own love for Clara. He reviewed his constant and unfailing brotherliness during their life in common at Newton-Forge. He dwelt upon the tenderness of respectful consolation with which, when his loving hopes were broken, Ingram had sought to pour balm into the heart's gaping wound.

"And Ingram himself had loved her. I have been

his accepted rival, and he to me, that 'friend that sticketh closer than a brother!' Oh, heart of hearts! man of men! Oh, true liver of that gospel of self-denying brotherhood of which the Lord hath called thee to be a preacher!" . . . .

"Chet," said the younger Digby that same night to his brother, as they were preparing to lie down upon their carpets in the best cell, which the gommos himself had given up to them; "I take to that man, Brandling! What a colonel it would make, with its engineering brain, for a regiment of sappers and miners!"—

"Why, Billy, I've heard you say a thousand times no man is fit to command soldiers who isn't a gentleman born. Now, Brandling was born a blacksmith!"

"Well—a—yes. I may have said so; but I've lost some of my old, exclusive notions since I've knocked more about the world. And, then, when one meets men of this Brandling stamp, it seems to me that one needn't contradict oneself upon the matter after all. For men of that sort, after all, you know, are"—

"Well, what are they?"

"It's the same notion upside down; they are neither more nor less than born gentlemen."

"Something in that, Bottlegreen, my boy! Good night; I'm turning in. Now for the Coptic fleas!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BUNCH OF KEYS AGAIN.

Old English archers, shooting at a willow wand, would cleave it, sometimes by an arrow, which stuck in the slender butt. More rarely, a second, from the same matchless bow, would even split the notch of the successful first; but both shafts, then, fell out upon the ground.

Pia was wiser than to run this risk.

She had said her say, and said no more.

In Clara's conscience and resolve no sudden change took place; but happily, not good causes alone are "lost" whose defender but "deliberates."

Few similes go on all fours. Clara's broad heart was, after all, no finger-thick target of willow to shoot at. The shaft of the old cottage dame at Wymerton was in it: and so was Mark's: and Pia's now.

It is a terrible question that of mixed motives. It is good not to judge others, because of our total ignorance of what moves them; but what if we had as much knowledge of their springs of action as even, after searching, we can gain of our own?

Must not the imperfection of that knowledge, could

we have it, utter again the warning, "thou shalt not judge"?

Gradually Clara found herself drawing onwards to that determination which she felt would meet with the approbation of those who loved her best: of all such, at least, except the dear old fanatical musician, the Maestro.

Of her increasing willingness she could have no doubt. She was in some doubt as to what it might be within her that was working upon her will.

Sometimes she would say inwardly:—

"This old enthusiasm for a dramatic life, whether of questionable worth or no, has lost me my heart's love already; shall I likewise let it lose me my heart's friend?"

Then she would object:—

"That is a selfish and mean way to debate the question; and raises a false issue, too. Pia's charity will not cast off even a rebel against her wisdom!"

Strange to say, there was no suggestion that Mark might be won back by her at cost of the sacrifice of her artist career. He had accepted her decision with such manful calm that she conceived him to have taken their parting to his stricken heart as a decree of fate, unquestioned for good and all, when once proclaimed. She did not do him the petty injury of supposing that he had ceased, or would cease, to love her; but she conceived that her own hardness and unreason in the manner of the breach between them had made it irreparable. The living tendon had not only been cut; but cut by a caustic knife, which left not even bleeding fibres to unite, perhaps, again.

So far then her soul would act unbribed, were she indeed to do that now, for the very suggestion of which she had spurned him. There was pure satisfaction in that thought. There was a satisfaction also, surely of no very impure alloy, in thinking that, though Mark would not know now, nor soon, how she had yielded;—if indeed she should yield, that was not fully determined yet,—still, that after long years, when it should be evident, even from the negative evidence of her non-appearance on any public stage, that she had renounced her career, Mark would know at last that she had done what his loving judgment had declared to be alone worthy of herself. She knew that his heart was noble enough to rejoice at knowledge that she had done right, let it come when it would, and with whatever emptiness of personal advantage to himself.

Knowledge that she had done right!

That was, of course, according to his standard. She had not yet agreed to fix her own at the same height.

Pia was careful not only to speak no more upon the general question of principle involved in that one conversation so full of varied episodes of tenderness and wrath; but she abstained now, as much as possible, from any talk concerning her friend's affections. She had a presentiment that whatever struggle was in its throes at this time in Clara's being would end in the sacrifice she longed to see her make: and she, too, desired that the offering should be pure. Clara was no weakling, who must be coaxed to drink the bitter health-draught, and Pia jealously kept herself from flavouring the cup's rim with the honey of what might prove deceitful, and certainly would act as seductive

hope. Yet one thing she had firmly settled in her sisterly mind, which was, to seek out Mark, and when Clara's victory should be won, to make his hand, if the Lord would so allow it, hold out at least one crown. Amongst other steps which she took for gaining, unknown to Clara, some clue to his whereabout, she wrote to her humble countrywoman, Rosina, still in the service of Beatrice Trelawney, and enjoining upon her the strictest secrecy, requested her to communicate with herself at once if she should hear any information in England respecting the gentleman whom she called the Marzocco, and whose real English name was Brandling.

One morning, in the very early spring, before the fashionable London season had in any way begun, Clara received a letter from home. It came from the manager, offering a sort of compromise. Indeed, so far as Clara's own solitary stipulation went, it was no compromise, but an absolute surrender on his part. It was a compromise only in respect of what the old Maestro had been insisting on: that there should be no other artist engaged concurrently with Clara, who might be supposed to be disputing with her on the same stage the sceptre of the Queenship of song. Now, the manager wrote to say that Madame Solano, "a well-tried and incontestable favourite of the musical public," was about to conclude an engagement with him under peculiar circumstances. From causes which had affected her health; and yet had left her voice untouched, she had been two years in retirement from the stage. Even now, though he had succeeded in prevailing upon her to appear again for this one season at Her Majesty's

theatre, she could only do so on every third opera-night, and thus a fair field was open to Miss Jerningham's talents and genius, of which he trusted she would avail herself; and although he deplored the eccentric resolution she had adopted, to exclude herself from many pieces in the "Repertoire," so admirably adapted to her peculiar powers, yet he was happy to have the opportunity of thus securing the invaluable co-operation of Miss Jerningham without offence to any of her own prejudices, as he must still venture to designate them. He might add, that independently of Madame Solano's amiable character, so well known to himself, as offering every guarantee against intrigue or professional jealousies, that lady had determined, reluctantly, upon ceasing to struggle against her malady in respect of stage effort; and he made little doubt but that she would be the first to applaud and encourage the onward steps of a worthy successor to herself in the career she was abandoning with regret.

Clara felt, upon reading this letter, that no such occasion as this would arise again for deciding upon pursuit or relinquishment of her artistic profession.

I will pry no farther into such conflict as arose for the last time within her; this only will I say, she took no further counsel of any being here on earth. But on the third day from her first reading of it, Clara came into Pia's room, and said quietly,

"Here is a letter I have received; and here a copy of the answer I have sent. You have conquered, Pia!"

Without looking at either, the sick girl understood; she pressed her thin hands fervently together, and looked upwards, and gave utterance to thanks.

June came. Town was full. The Trelawneys were there, in a little house facing the Park. Chetwynde Digby was also there, on his return from Egypt; and so was his brother William, whose "gazette" was out, and who was "Major, for distinguished service in the field." Both these gentlemen were often in Charley's house, of whose good natured little Beatrice both were very fond.

"It's a marvel to me, Mrs. Trelawney, how you ever came to promotion under that title," said the big man, one afternoon. Rosina was in the room with baby in her arms.

"It's a defection of which Charley should have been the last man guilty, for him to have married a lady neither 'Pol,' 'Tre,' nor 'Pen.'"

"Well, I think he has 'pentimenti' sometimes now concerning it," she answered, laughingly; "but what can't be cured, you know?"

"How dare you, Beatrice? 'Tis a very remarkable coincidence, however," said her husband, with ludicrous gravity, "that Madame Vantini, her mother, you know she is an Englishwoman, comes of a Devonshire family, who have twice intermarried with good Cornish names."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby. "So there's a vein of copper in Mrs. Trelawney's arteries after all; and when you succumbed to her charms, my Cornish lad, you knew the reason why? Eh?"

Trelawney looked as if there was more in it than his boisterous friend acknowledged, after all. But the other resumed,

"With whom do you think, by-the-way, we fell in, and went a-ducking together in Egypt, t'other day?

An old acquaintance of ours in Venice, though I don't think Mrs. Trelawney knew him there."

"What! Bob Snapper? Let me see. No! Snapper wasn't at Venice at all, was he?"

"No, not the Honourable Bob. I was up the Nile with him, though. You'll never guess. It was the 'rascally Radical!'"

"Ingram's great friend, Mark Brandling, do you mean?"

Rosina started at the name, and nearly let the baby fall. She listened attentively.

"Yes! Mark Brandling. It was you that said he was a rascally Radical, don't you remember? He's come to all sorts of honour and glory in the engineering way, and is building a bridge over the Nile, which created fits of admiration in Bottlegreen here, who wants to make Brandling Chief Commissioner of Works in India, I believe. Bottlegreen is monstrous scientific for a rifleman, I can tell you."

"Well! I do remember I said something about his being a 'rascally Radical' when we met him first; but I also said he was the sort of looking man that's 'awful in mathematics,' and I was right, you see."

Rosina wrote that night, with profound secrecy, and considerable difficulty, being a poor penwoman, to the Illustrissima Nobilissima Signora Contessa Pia dei Guari. Her letter was to the effect that the Marzocco was become a great lord; was Viceroy-Radical of the Indies; General-in-Chief of all English engineers; was in Egypt, where Moses had been, and wicked King Pharaoh, and was building a bridge there over the Red Sea.

Some abatements were certainly necessary from this statement; but Pia's shrewdness easily made them, and she had henceforth a sufficient clue to guide her.

Three or four months were gone. The summer had been spent by her and her friends at the baths of Lucca. Cousin Martha's health was completely restored. Sir Jeffrey's delight at the dispelling of his favourite's great delusion was unbounded. He was continually complaining of the dulness of Wymerton without her, and was beginning to press it upon her that she and her cousin should return to England, and pass the winter at the old place again. If the Contessa Pia and her mother would but do him the distinguished honour of accepting also the awkward hospitalities of an old bachelor's house, he should be more gratified than he could hope to express. One only addition to the pleasure he could think of was, that Count Orazio should join them there. His political opinions, which kept him in exile from fair Florence, would be but an additional title in England to the respect and esteem of liberal-minded men. Clara could inform him, through his sister, of the probable attractions of the coverts at Wymerton to a gentleman of his age.

"What a delightful scheme! But my poor spine, you know, Carissima, would never stand the journey there. I have loved that old baronet these years for your sake though, and now for my own, because of his kind thought for poor Orazio. My brother shall accept his invitation. Some talk with the wiser liberal sort of Englishmen is just what his political education has always wanted, and some personal contact with the living work of English liberty. I shall write myself

to your dear Sir Jeffrey, and ask him to receive Orazio without my mother and me."

The Cascine were still beautiful. The foliage of their trees burnt red and brown by the hot kisses of the Florentine summer sun; but the grass carpet of their meadows had freshened into green again; early autumn showers from the Apennines had once more quickened their parched herbage. The vintage at the "vigna" of the Dei Guari villa was over; and they were back in their town palazzo: Clara and Cousin Martha with them still; but the time of their return to England was near.

It was not too cool to make it still very pleasant, in the late afternoon, to draw up, after Florentine custom, near the Grand Duke's dairy, to hear the military band.

"It was just here, Clara, opposite that identical white post, and under this very tree, that the Milordo came and reined up at the carriage door and saluted you. Do you remember it?"

"As yesterday."

"I am so glad the Milordo never was, as I fancied, and fancy still he wished to be, the hero of your romance."

Clara smiled, but rather feebly. Her romance had been too sad and chastening a reality for her to bear mention of it in playful talk. She rather wondered at Pia's careless word. Pia smiled too, with a curious expression, unnoticed by her friend.

"Supposing, now that shallow-hearted lord had offered you the coronet of an English peeress, I wonder whether it had won you more easily than we have done from the stage."

A red spot came angrily on Clara's white forehead. She was very much hurt.

"How can you say so, Pia? Do you think me, then, after all, so base? Do you think I should have done for rank or wealth what I refused to do for such a heart as—as—as I have lost?"

"You think he was a man worth loving then, that Mr. Brandling?"

"So well worth loving," she answered proudly, "that though I spoke of myself, Pia, the offence in what you just said lies in the indignity your question does to him."

Pia smiled again with the same curious smile, and when the piece was finished which the band was playing, ordered the carriage home.

"We are leaving early, are we not?" said Clara.

"No!" said Pia, looking at her watch, "we shall be just in time."

Clara wondered at her still.

There was a "cortile" with a colonnade, of course, inside the massive walls of the old house of the Del Guari, and two main staircases. Pia's own rooms were nearer that which was on their left as they drove in. The carriage drew up at it, and two servants were to carry her up upon a swinging chair. Clara was following, and had her hand on Pia's shoulder behind.

"No! no! Carissima; I want you to go up the other staircase and through the music room, because—because, if you see my maid in the little room to the right, you could tell her to come at once to me."

But Pia spoke as if at random, and Clara obeyed, still wondering at her.

The maid was not in the little room to the right. Clara passed through the music room into the library. And when she saw—Mark there—her heart was hushed from its quick beat. At last she said:

"I am ashamed to say 'forgive me!' ashamed only, do not think otherwise, because I have such reason to say forgive!"

But Mark said nothing of forgiveness. He smiled, the tender smile which is so touching on the features of a strong, grave man: and he took out from his breast a little bunch of common household keys; the tinkle of them, as he did so, rang joy in Clara's heart. And he held them out towards her, and then spoke:

"Dearer than dearest, take them! Take them, my own dear love!"

CHAPTER XXX.

VOCATION DECIDED.

VISCOUNT WINDLESHAM was taking to politics at last, much to the satisfaction of the noble Earl, his father. Two considerations dashed, perhaps, that satisfaction a little. The one, a suspicion, not ill-founded, that his son and heir was taking to that noble pursuit rather as a "pis-aller" than otherwise. The second, a misgiving as to the soundness of the Viscount's party creed. Of a truth, that self-indulgent young nobleman was rather making an experiment to discover some object of new interest, than seriously betaking himself to the fulfilment of a recognised duty in entering upon public life. It would have been better had the reverse been the fact; but I cannot think it wholly bad that matters were even what they were in this respect.

There was in the young man no kind of intellectual deficiency; but powers of shrewd observation, a varied experience of life considering his age, and a certain versatile faculty of entering into the feelings of other men, which might prove a stepping-stone out of the slough of selfishness, and was not, as it is in some, a weakener of his force of will. Taints of evil there be

beyond a doubt in the atmosphere of politics. How not? since policy is of things human. And these, it is true, may fasten on the weak points of the Viscount's character, and poison all with the corruption of deadly disease. But there be likewise in that same atmosphere, infections—if the word be not itself invidious—of healthful and generous thought and feeling, such as may help to cleanse the plague spots, and, interpenetrating the whole character, may give it some new worth. I will hope it may prove so with Viscount Windlesham.

And I think, which the noble Earl his father did not, that the creed to which the Viscount was inclining, might in this same respect be salutary. This is no place for a political treatise. I shall not say whether the Earl himself were Whig or Tory, whether he took his seat and gave his vote in the Upper House amongst the immemorial preservers of all things old, or the magnates of Great Revolution families. But in one thing I applaud Lord Windlesham. He thought it best not to be cramped by the traditionary pledges of his family, and still refused to offer himself to the constituency of that county in which its influence was strong. He was a candidate for a middle-sized manufacturing borough, and was canvassing it now on conciliatory principles. I know the magnificent denunciations which, from above, are thundered sometimes upon such an attempt. I know the mud with which it will be sometimes bespattered from below. I do not think I am quite blind to the temptations it may bring with it to double-facedness and insincerity. But for all that, I cannot help herein sympathizing with the Viscount.

And I think that so long as there is no base and mean personal end in view, no unworthy pursuit of place or popularity, there is no fear whatever of aristocratic patent-leather boots being soiled in any way by a turn through democratic puddles; nor any on the other hand, that the purity of those popular pools will be poisoned by the wading in them of those high-born feet.

"Who says 'election,' says 'attorney,'" to give an English fact a French face.

Lord Windlesham's attorney and confidential agent was not one of the great London undertakers of Parliamentary commissions; but a local authority: a man of no great intellectual power or refined education, but acute enough, knowing his fellow-townsmen well, and in such fair repute among them as an attorney might be. His name was far from distinctive, being simply Mr. Smith. Under his guidance Lord Windlesham had begun an active personal canvass of the borough; a process through which, I fear, the reader would never forgive me for carrying him or her even in summary; else might I be tempted to tell of his Lordship's earnest debate with that staunch old Conservative gentleman, who loudly professed his personal attachment to a free Constitution, whilst desiring the Viscount to pledge himself, under awful imprecations, to resist unto death the repeal of some enactment which eighteen-twentieths of the free people of this country heartily detested, one other twentieth entirely despised, and only the most headstrong and obtuse of the remaining portion ever ventured in public to defend. And, as a set-off, I might venture to give the details of his subtle discussion with that thorough-going Radical shoemaker,

who, keenly alive to the necessity of increasing the direct responsibility of the ministers of the Crown to the people, insisted upon their exclusion from a seat in either House of Parliament; and who, by way of safeguard to the "religious liberty of the subject," was anxious for the passing of a Bill to make the celebration of public worship penal. But I pass on, as, in course of time, the Viscount was forced to do, whether leaving his eager disputants convinced or unconvinced.

Upon the outskirts of the town, one day, Mr. Smith and his Lordship came to a large factory. I need not describe it, nor its huge sheds, nor its tall chimneys, nor its black watercourses, nor its confused noise. It was a workshop of Vulcan. The resistless weight of steam-hammers was there, and the flying power of tremendous lathes, cutting steel like ivory, but ivory itself, if necessary, with more than the nicety of a watchmaker's hand. Its peculiarity was in the wide expanse of open field around it, in the well-ordered grouping of the well-built cottages, detached, and each surrounded by a plot of garden ground. There was a sort of playing ground at one side, and gymnastic apparatus in it. The schools, and apparently a chapel, were on the opposite side of the road. Standing back beyond them, in a shrubbery, which seemed to make a brave but not entirely successful struggle for healthy life in the uncongenial neighbourhood, stood a well-proportioned house of fair size. The lawn in front was rather dingy, but the flower-beds a miracle of gardening skill and of artistic effect in colour. A conservatory of fine height and width stood on the left wing.

"Branch establishment of a very great firm, my

lord," said Mr. Smith, pointing to the works, "almost their chief branch in the mechanical way, by this time, I believe. Manchester firm, my lord, 'Bright, Brassy, and Brandling.'"

His lordship was busy entering certain notes and promises in his canvassing-book, and did not appear to notice the name particularly.

"Junior partner resides here, my lord, and superintends everything himself. The seniors, admirable men of business for years, and very successful in contracts and so forth; but they say this junior has brains beyond them all. Wonderful mechanical genius, I've heard say. Patentee of several important improvements in the higher sort of machinery. This way, my lord;" and he turned in at a side-gate, and they both went towards the house. His lordship now looked up from the canvassing-book with an indistinct apprehension of what Mr. Smith had said. But he gave one of his quick intuitive glances at the house and its surroundings, and the great workshops opposite, and took it all in, and inquired:—

"Rights of capital the tack to go upon here, Mr. Smith? Unshackled liberty of commerce; but salutary restrictions upon pernicious combinations, I suppose? Advantages of competition and folly of strikes, eh?"

Mr. Smith smiled appreciatively, but answered:

"Well, not absolutely and entirely, my lord. The fact is, I've heard as much of the claims of labour in this house as of the rights of capital. Our master-manufacturers are shy about some doctrines broached here. And, to tell you the truth, Bright and Brassy themselves, though reckoned liberal-minded men, were a

little uneasy, at first, I heard. Our last strike, though, has reassured them a good deal, if not altogether."

"How so, sir?" asked the Viscount.

"Their hands turned out with the rest, though there was some doubt, at first, whether they would do so; the chief here being so much trusted by the men. But, instead of joining the masters' counter-combination—for which he was roundly abused, by the by—he called a conference with the 'hands' or their delegates."

"Well, and what did he do with them?"

"Told them, first of all, that it was absurd to treat the matter in a lump; but that he would go through the departments, one by one, with the heads of all of them?"

"Did the hands agree?"

"After a while, my lord."

"And the result?"

"That he admitted certain claims, upon examination, fully; others partially; and forced the men to see that, in respect of others, he could not give way, in justice to the whole concern, my lord."

"Were the men reasonable, or did they try coercion?"

"Coerce him, my lord? You might as well coerce one of his steam-hammers with your little finger."

"And did the hands take on again?"

"All but about a score or two out of five hundred, my lord; and the works were not stopped three days; whilst the combination masters didn't patch up a peace with their men for nearly seven weeks."

"An interesting man, Mr. Smith, apparently. I hope we may find him at home."

When the door was opened, however, the servant opined that "Master was not at home;" but suggested that he might be somewhere on the works at this hour. If the gentlemen would walk in and sit down, some one should go over and see.

The gentlemen walked in and sat down.

"There's a wife here, for certain;" began the Viscount, after a cursory inspection of the sitting-room into which they had been shown.

"Oh, yes, my lord; certainly."

"Only a wife? Or a manufacturess; like the master?"

"I beg your pardon, my lord?" inquired Mr. Smith, not exactly seizing the drift of the Viscount's question.

"I mean, has she any of her husband's influence or ability, or is she merely an exemplary housekeeper?"

"Oh, ah! yes, my lord, I understand you now. She's very good-looking and stately to begin with, that I can answer for; and I'm told a remarkable woman in her way, very."

"And is that her husband's way at all? How does she like those big workshops and their turbulent hands so close upon her domestic territories?"

"Why they *do* say that her presence here goes for something considerable in his influence over them. The wives and mothers are her sworn friends; but, what's more singular, they say the 'hands' themselves think even more of her than their 'wominfolk,' as they call them, do."

"Indeed! Then it seems she's just the wife for the man: 'the right woman in the right place,' in point of fact. Any notion who or what she was, Mr. Smith?"

"Well, I've heard many conjectures," answered the attorney, "nothing one could put in as evidence though, my lord, as I may say. He married her abroad, I believe, though she's an Englishwoman, somewhere in Egypt, I think. He was out there on engineering business, two or three years before Bright and Brassy started the concern here under him."

It was a warm day, and the windows were all open. The prattle of a child was heard. Presently it began to cry. Then a sweet rich woman's voice began a crooning song to still it, which passed insensibly into a more regular, sustained melody. The music seemed to gain upon the unseen singer; and, at last, was poured forth in the most thrilling and impassioned strain.

Mr. Smith was amazed to see the effect upon the rather listless Viscount.

"Ah, yes! that's her voice, my lord. I've not much ear for music myself; but it's very much admired, I know. My daughter, Sophia-Ann, a tasty performer herself, my lord, was at a concert, got up in the factory school here, by their people, where Mrs. Brandling sung; and she tells me that in all her life she never heard the like of it; and yet she's been to the three last Birmingham Musical Festivals, and heard the crack singers. I have heard a rumour somewhere that Mrs. Brandling had been a professional."

Lord Windlesham had caught the name now, and his agitation visibly increased. All manner of reminiscence and conjecture came crowding upon his mind. He looked round the room eagerly in search of something which might make all clear,

Upon a side-table he saw a morocco case, somewhat

like one in which a larger miniature is kept, only a trifle deeper. He ventured to press the spring and open it. There was no miniature, but a gold filigree crown of exquisite workmanship.

He looked at it more narrowly: and on the burnished ribbon of the garland read, "Italia, Claræ, ob civem servatum."

"Vocation manquée!" he said aloud, almost involuntarily.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," again inquired Mr. Smith.

"A mistake in life, I meant;" he answered, scarcely knowing what he said; "that's to say, no! nothing in particular, my dear sir."

Mr. Smith stared outright.

The Viscount closed the case with a snap.

"Do you know, really, Mr. Smith, this canvassing fatigues one more than I expected; and with such a man as you represent Mr. Brandling to be, one should come fresh to a serious political conversation. I think, with your kind permission, I will leave you to make formal application for his vote and interest to-day, and I will take some other opportunity myself of paying my personal respects."

With that he went right out, leaving his agent dumbfoundered.

A mistake in life! Yes! Clara had committed one; in the contrary sense to what the Viscount meant. But the Lord's goodness had permitted her to repair it.

If Viscount Windlesham had chanced to take in hand a Bible which lay on the table close by the morocco case that held her crown, I verily believe it would have

opened of itself at a page, to which, times without number, Clara Brandling delighted to turn. He might have read on it her answer to his exclamation. There was a pencil mark to these words:—

"I will, therefore, that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."

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Poor Rosina, the girl with the heart of gold, had many weary years to wait for her share in household happiness. No money offer could buy off her Tonietto from the hated service of the "Tedesco." They kept for years his once open bronzed throat cramped in the Austrian military stock, his active bronzed legs tight in the blue breeches of the Austrian uniform. Mosquitoes on the Moldavian line of the Danube attacked him with a fury unknown even to those lively stingers the "zenzale" of his own dear Venice: and the miasma of the border-marshes fevered his blood as had never done the exhalations of the hottest summer from his native Venetian canals.

But worst of all—or best of all—they marched him out to fight for that Kaiser's rule which, in the deep of his Venetian heart, he hated unto the death. And in that quarrel, upon a wide Hungarian plain, the sabre of a light hussar, swarthier than even he, laid him prostrate with a gash which actually slivered the collar-bone.

"Just there it was," he thought with bitterness, as he lay on his poor camp-hospital bed; "just there, my

cruel, treacherous knife turned aside from the heart of that kind Englishman."

Rosina preached to him in after years the doctrine of retribution, when that old wound would ache. She thought it wholesome doctrine for her poor, jealous, passionate Tonietto. And so, my good readers, do I.

THE END.

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